'ALIMAH TO *IMAMAH*:

MUSLIM WOMEN'S APPROACHES TO RELIGIOUS LEADERSHIP AND

AUTHORITY IN THE AMERICAN CONTEXT

By

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ABSTRACT

ZAHRA AYUBI: *'Alimah* to *Imamah*: Muslim Women's Approaches to Religious
Leadership and Authority in the American Context
(Under the direction of Professors Omid Safi, Carl Ernst, and Julianne Hammer)

My thesis investigates how traditional notions of religious authority in Muslim societies
are complicated and challenged by religious leadership roles and prescriptive stances
that two female American Muslim figures, namely Ingrid Mattson and Amina Wadud,
take on gender debates in institutional and academic settings. Wadud and Mattson
apply their agency in interpreting the religious tradition and scriptural sources, creating
or contributing to alternative approaches to religious discourse in a fashion that is
decidedly in favor of women assuming leadership roles in Muslim communities. In this
thesis I present a three-fold argument. First, a shift in paradigms of Muslim religious
authority in the United States is beginning to include gender consciousness as part
of community conversations and in some notable, exceptional cases, women such as
Mattson and Wadud have taken on roles of religious authority. Secondly, American
Muslim women's claims to religious authority do not represent a uniform vision of
women and leadership in Islam, as evidenced by the divergent views of Mattson and
Wadud on the kinds of public religious roles they feel Muslim women can Qur'anically
or legally assume. Finally, scholars of contemporary Islam and gender debates must
theoretically wrestle with the role of the United States as a context of these debates,
which means looking at Islam in the context of American religious history.

To my husband, whose spiritual authority I respect,
and who respects my spiritual authority.

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Introduction

My thesis investigates how traditional notions of religious authority in Muslim societies are complicated and challenged by religious leadership roles and prescriptive stances that two female American Muslim figures, namely Ingrid Mattson and Amina Wadud, take on gender debates in institutional and academic settings; they are part of a shift in the way we contextualize Muslim gender debates in the United States. Muslim communities within the United States are increasingly concerned with the image of gender relations in their communities, if not becoming more gender conscious themselves. As such, some Muslim communities in the United States have come to recognize that women can potentially play roles in public relations for their communities, while improving their experiences within the community.

The grand historical narrative regarding American Muslims privileges the normative lens of mostly immigrant, men who traditionally hold roles of authority of *imam* or *alim*. Regardless of whether American Muslim imams have had formal training, which would most commonly be acquired outside the United States, they define for their communities what is Islamic and what standards of Muslim life, including gender relations are. They are also the ones to whom scholars, ethnographers, and American media turn for information about Muslim communities in the United States. In this exchange, women's participation, perspectives and the ways they negotiate their faith in America are largely left out or marginalized. Focusing on two figures, Ingrid Mattson and Amina Wadud, in my thesis I explore the ways these women claim religious authority, and in doing so, how they affect the course of gender debates within an American Muslim context.

Although Amina Wadud's leadership of Friday prayers in March 2005 and Ingrid Mattson's election in 2006 to the Presidency of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), the largest Muslim institution on the continent, attracted great publicity to the idea of women's religious authority in Muslim communities, much of the ensuing conversations after each event respectively were about the permissibility of women leading men in prayer in Islamic jurisprudence or about questioning the meaning, significance, and role of a woman as community leader. There has been very little discussion focused on their own scholarly interpretations of traditional Islamic sources with regard to women's religious authority, and much less on the American Muslim context that frames visions of women's religious leadership. Perhaps this is because as Tayyibah Taylor, the editor in chief of a popular American Muslim Women's magazine called *Azizah* writes: "Nowhere does the issue of gender equity become more complex than in the discussion of female leadership. Even those who purport absolute equality between women and men often hesitate, and sometimes blanch, when it comes to advocating or accepting the leadership of a woman."[1] The stakes in the debate over women's *religious* leadership, not just women's leadership of mixed gendered prayers, are high because for many it raises questions of gender equality in the eyes of God. It becomes the site of negotiating women's agency and recognition of their full humanity.

I am interested in two expressions of agency and power by Wadud and Mattson, their understandings of religious authority and exercise of religious leadership. It is under these two categories that the following three roles fall: the first is of the scholar or *'alimah* who interprets the Qur'an and makes policy recommendations; second is Islamic ritual authority of leading prayer or *imamah*, which only Wadud has assumed; and third is of an institutional leader of a Muslim community, which Mattson became when she was elected as the president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Although the final role is one of a public intellectual and managerial, all three roles are an expression of religious agency, and moral and spiritual autonomy. I will make

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[1]Tayyibah Taylor, "Women and Leadership: What Happens When We're In Charge?" *Azizah Magazine.* 2, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 27.

the finer point of distinguishing forms of authority from leadership in the next section. Additionally it is crucial to note that Amina Wadud has not permanently assumed the role of an imamah; rather, there were instances of her delivering sermons and leading prayers in various locations, including outside the United States, as she does not have what Khaled Abou el Fadl has called, and Juliane Hammer has pointed to with respect to Asma Barlas, an interpretive community or a congregation which regularly follows Wadud's school of thought.[2]

Wadud and Mattson, who are both Islamic Studies professors in American universities, apply their agency and exercise authority in interpreting the religious tradition and scriptural sources, creating or contributing to alternative approaches to religious discourse in a fashion that is decidedly in favor of women assuming leadership roles in Muslim communities. In this thesis I present a three-fold argument. First, a shift in paradigms of Muslim religious authority in the United States is beginning to include gender consciousness as part of community conversations and in some notable, exceptional cases, women such as Mattson and Wadud have taken on roles of religious authority.[3] Secondly, American Muslim women's claims to religious authority do not represent a uniform vision of women and leadership in Islam, as evidenced by the divergent views of Mattson and Wadud on the kinds of public religious roles they feel Muslim women can Qur'anically or legally assume. Finally, scholars of contemporary Islam and gender debates must theoretically wrestle with the role of location as a context of these debates. In regard to my last argument more specifically, I theorize the interpretive moves of Mattson and Wadud regarding women's religious and spiritual authority in the context of Islam in America as a part of the American religious landscape, while also discussing the limitations of the American historical context. I ask what is the role

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[2]Juliane Hammer, "Identity, Authority, and Activism: American Muslim Women Approach the Quran" *The Muslim World* 98 (October 2008): 451.

[3]Please note that I am emphasizing the exceptional nature of women filling roles of religious leadership, while recognizing that the idea of women's religious authority in the United States is a conversation that is no longer entirely unimaginable as a result of these exceptional cases and increased gender consciousness.

of location and context in the formation of these two scholarly positions on women's religious leadership. Wadud and Mattson reveal in their own work a tension in how they situate themselves against a backdrop of race, feminism, and religion in America on the one hand, and Muslim gender debates and the Islamic intellectual tradition on the other hand. As such, the main categories I will be using to discuss these women's approaches are: their visions of women's power and agency in Islam, their faith versus feminist approaches, visions of social and religious reform in Muslim communities, and their relationship to the American religious landscape.

Mattson and Wadud are both American Muslim convert women, scholars and professors, and have made significant contributions to discourses on leadership and religious authority, despite domination by male scholars on these topics. Ingrid Mattson has described herself as a religiously conservative, legal modernist. This approach enables her to think about reform and new approaches to gender debates within a Muslim framework. Wadud has called herself a pro-faith, pro-feminist Muslim woman, which has meant that she also puts Islam at the center of her scholarship on gender justice. Being converts and having only North American backgrounds, both are committed to engaging with Muslim gender debates through Muslim discourse. Both advocate for reform not just for Islamic law to reflect American Muslim social realities, but specifically for the inclusion of women in religious authority; however they do so through different trajectories and language which reflect their racial backgrounds and relationship to the backdrop of feminist discourse in North America. Why does Mattson limit the scope of women's religious authority to exclude *imamat*, while Wadud does not? Why is Mattson maintaining the adjectives "religiously conservative" to describe her discourse, and why does Wadud describe her position as pro-feminist and not feminist?

These terms reveal fissures and divergent approaches to the question of women's religious authority, either pastoral or ritual leadership. More importantly they uncover a tension in the ways in which Mattson and Wadud situate themselves in an American Muslim backdrop and thus necessitate contextualization of American Muslim women's claims to any form of religious authority in the American Religious landscape, as well

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as Muslim gender debates. What are the ways in which American Muslim women's experiences are a part of American women's religious history and mirror similar debates regarding their roles in social and cultural maintenance, relationships with men, agency and claims to power, and faith versus feminism? To ask these questions, even putting aside the comparison with American women of other traditions, we need a re-theorization of Muslim gender debates that incorporates, on the one hand, a nuanced look at the effects of the surrounding American milieu that do not simply equate Americanization with modernization of Muslim communities and on the other hand, recognizes and legitimizes Muslim women's engagements with the Islamic interpretive tradition.

This can be a difficult task because of the limitations of the American context, one of which is the trap of hegemonic discourse which locates recent inclusion of women as a symptom of Western or American influence, as if gender egalitarianism, or feminism, are imparted to Muslims as a gift from the so-called West. This is not my argument. Indeed shifts in religious authority and inclusion of women in Muslim discourses are taking place in non-Western contexts as well. As such, both Mattson and Wadud circumvent the question of where their reformist impulses originate, by historically grounding themselves in North America but almost exclusively using the terms of Muslim discourse.

A second limitation of focusing on the American context as the main frame of discourse is that the transnational interactions of Wadud and Mattson with Muslims outside the United States are lost. Both Wadud and Mattson have spent significant time outside of the United States and in Wadud's case, her first major scholarly project of creating a Qur'anic reading from a woman's perspective was published in Malaysia as a result of her scholar-activist activities in that country. In this thesis I do not discuss the ways in which their time abroad shaped their scholarship or scholarly visions of religious authority. However, without wanting to minimize their continued connection with communities outside the United States, in focusing on the role of location in these two scholars' claims to religious authority in an American context, I enable the discus-

sion of the particulars of the American context that help formulate their projects as well as a conversation regarding how this American context can inform broader Muslim discourse. Though Wadud and Mattson are American figures, their discussion of gender and religious authority is a significant contribution to transnational Muslim gender debates.

Additionally, it is not the motivation of this project to point to Muslim women leaders on the cutting edge of religious authority in order to minimize its largely patriarchal nature within most Muslim communities; rather it is to investigate the strategies and rationales these Muslim women have employed in their claims to religious authority, and explore the subsequent directions that discourses on gender relations are taking, which affect understandings of gender and American Muslim identity.

In undertaking this project, I am not a passive observer or an objective reporter. I am an American Muslim woman of Indian decent who was born and came of age in Saudi Arabia, where my mother's family had immigrated 60 years ago; I lived there mostly as an American expatriate, as my parents had immigrated to the United States forty years ago, but also at moments as a second generation Indian-Saudi when visiting my mother's family, and as an Indian when visiting my father's family. Although negotiating these three identities remains challenging for me, I have mostly directed my attention to what it means to be a Muslim woman in a global context as well as in these three locations individually. As a Muslim woman who believes in gender equality as divine justice, I have a personal interest in gender discourses in Islam and the directions they take.

The experiences I have had as a Muslim woman living in Muslim communities outside the U.S. enables me to think of gender debates in light of and outside American privilege and contexts. However, in this thesis I treat the American religious landscape as the location of my inquiry because I have experienced firsthand the ways in which Islam in America is a Muslim context in its own right, which has resulted from convergence of a number of experiences including racial difference, immigration, the heritage of slavery, and colonialism as well as belief in human potential, equality, freedom of

religion, and search for the Divine. These may not be unique to America, but certainly create a religious landscape where important discourses, such as American Muslim debates on gender and women's religious authority and agency, have global implications.

Chapter 1

Re-theorizing American Muslim Gender Debates: Complicating the Shari'a and Americanization Paradigms

The study of American Muslim history and American Islam are topics that have primarily fallen under the realm of the Islamic Studies field, rather than that of American Religions. The lack of theoretical or methodological cooperation between these two fields reveals that Muslims in America are either conceived of as an American extension to the study of Muslims from more "authentic" contexts, or as an honorable mention in a discussion on religious pluralism in America. The lack of exchange between the fields is particularly problematic when we study gender issues and Muslim women's discourses. At best, in the Islamic studies field much of the conversation regarding Islam and gender in America surrounds women's reconciliation of gender-related restrictions in Islamic law with American gender norms, assuming there is a need to reconcile the two, that this process is conflicting, and assuming there is some kind of Americanization process involved. At worst, in the field of American Religions, Muslim women are non-actors in the narrative of American Muslim history. As such the Shari'a paradigm

is one that reduces Muslim women's participation in American Muslim discourse to issues of legality from an Islamic perspective, while the Americanization paradigm of inquiry is one that is entirely interested in how the assimilation of these shari'a bound subjects occurs.

In this chapter I will first discuss issues surrounding Muslim women's claims to religious authority and engagements with the religious tradition, particularly on the part of Mattson and Wadud, that demonstrate the necessity for theoretical contextualization of American Muslim gender debates in both American religious history as well as discourses in Islamic studies, which are not limited to Islamic law. I will then discuss incorporating frameworks from American religious history which will enhance our methods of analysis (not replace them) since there are intersectional issues at play in studying Muslim women in America which are not limited to: post colonial and post slavery contexts, diversity in race and national origin, engagement with tradition and modernity, women's agency, location within in Muslim communities, and secular and religious education. At the conclusion of this thesis, I will particularly highlight broader American gender and race debates as being key factors that shape American Muslim discourse on gender relations and authority.

1.1 Framing Religious Authority in the United States

Mattson and Wadud are mostly concerned with three kinds of religious authority. Putting aside the question of Muslim women in roles of political authority entirely, both types of religious authority are concerned with moral or spiritual agency of women. The first kind is scholarly authority that is rooted in knowledge of Islam. The second is authority that is manifested in leadership and representation of Muslim communities. This may or may not include leadership in religious matters or offering legal opinions, but is the role of organizing, administering, representing and leading the Muslim community for the sake of building the community, being a voice for and of the Muslim

community, and determining the overall direction of the community. The third type of religious authority is of ritual leadership of sermons and prayers. Ritual leadership implies qualifications that enable one to also speak for the community, and provide religious or legal advice.

What is the origin and nature of religious authority? For Max Weber authority is created through charismatic ideal types (archetypes found in human society) and taboos. Magicians, prophets, priests are examples of charismatic ideal types who through their charisma, power, or exemplary behavior compel people to be religious, albeit in different ways. Charisma can work through taboo, another commonly found ideal type in societies, in order to create religious rights and wrongs and assert authoritatively on those ethics: "the rationalization of taboos leads ultimately to a system of norms according to which certain actions are permanently construed as religious abominations [...]."[1] Weber says in *The Sociology of Religion* "faith loses its intellectual character" with a "declaration of confidence in and dedication to a prophet or to the authority of a structured institution."[2] This means that the authority figures in religious communities are the intellectual stewards of the community in matters of faith and command submission. People must submit themselves to an authority and let that entity *think* for them. Submitting one's self to religious authority, however, is not the same as completely leaving rationality behind on the part of the believer. Rather, for Weber it is entirely reasonable that people submit to figures of authority in matters of belief because of its characteristics of charisma, specialization of knowledge, and establishment of societal norms that need to be enforced through the institution of authority. From Weber's definition we are left with authority being equivalent to the power of ordering or deciding for a group based on specialized knowledge of the origins of social norms and ethics, that is displayed through charismatic leadership that draws in believers.

What makes someone authoritative is related to the element of public submission

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[1]Weber, 38.

[2]Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 194.

to figures with authoritative leadership. Consistent with Weber's idea that specialized knowledge is required for authority, Khaled Abou El Fadl says that historically text-based legitimacy, that is–extraction of Divine intention from the Qur'an and Sunnah, has always rested with jurists and other scholars in Muslim societies. In Abou El Fadl's view, there is also a fine line between the authoritative and authoritarian, which Weber does not account for, perhaps because they are both the same for him. For Abou El Fadl, the defining factor of authority and legitimacy is training and scholarship. In contrast to how authority has been constructed and legitimized throughout Muslim history, he says that in the United States "it has become common for one to read a few *hadith* and declare oneself qualified to render judgment on an issue that has engaged Islamic thinking for centuries."[3] Although specialized knowledge is a necessary requisite, in the United States claims to authority are made freely, even without proper qualifications. Furthermore, these kinds of authorities, who lack training and therefore legitimacy, also create Weberian social norms for American Muslim society with respect to gender relations, often originating from outside the United States:

> Most of the determinations of the various hadith-hurling parties in the United States mirrored and relied on the discourses of various factions in the Muslim world as a whole. So, for instance, legal determinations by some organizations in the United States that exhibited a psychotic contempt of women were mere transplants of the determinations of influential Muslim organizations in some Muslim countries.[4]

Though this raises the question of what an American Muslim framework of gender relations would look like for Abou El Fadl, he most importantly highlights the lack of scholarly training of the predominantly male actors in authoritative gender discourses in American Muslim communities. American Muslim authority is largely in the hands of Muslim men from "native Muslim" contexts who bring not only sexist interpretations to American Muslim institutions, but also undermine American developments to

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[3]Khaled Abou El Abou El Fadl, *And God Knows the Soldiers* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2001), 61.

[4]Khaled Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name: Islamic law, Authority and Women* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), xi.

Islamic discourse such as made by African-American Muslims and women in general.

However, in his emphasis on scholarly training as a pillar of authoritative legitimacy, Abou el Fadl neglects to discuss what that training entails in modern times. In his view because in modern Muslim countries, Islamic law has been bound with state authority as a result of post-colonial movements, there is a vacuum in Islamic authority left by the diminished power of traditional institutions. He asserts that jurists are now self-taught and Islamic authority has been popularized to the point that "every Muslim with a modest knowledge of the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet was suddenly considered qualified.[5] He states that Islamic law "was now field ripe for pietistic fictions and crass generalizations, rather than a technical discipline of complex interpretive practices and sophisticated methodologies of social and textual analysis.[6] His nostalgic formulation of proper Islamic authority is not to be found in modern times at all, even at "the once prestigious Azhar University [now] entirely dependent on the government.[7]

Certainly women's participation in Islamic discourses is an exercise Abou El Fadl would support, but he does not realize that the most common way that discourses seeking to delegitimize Muslim women's participation is through criticism of their training. Women continue to be excluded from the kind of classical training that Abou El Fadl says is required to make authoritative claims. In the case of the women I study here, both are trained in American universities. What makes them authoritative? Although he does not introduce it as a resolution to this question, Abou El Fadl's discussion of the other component of religious authority, namely interpretive community of an authority figure which adopts or attempts to embody the textual interpretation of an authority figure, helps us begin the discussion of what gives Muslim women religious authority.

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[5]About El Fadl, Khaled, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (New York: Harper Collins, 2005), 38.

[6]Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, 39.

[7]Abou El Fadl, *The Great Theft*, 42.

For authority to be authoritative or exercised, the receptiveness of the community is essential. Abou El Fadl says, "the meanings produced by the interpretive communities have become firmly established to the point that they have become a part of the authorial enterprise."[8] In other words, the interpretive community itself becomes a legitimate source of authority under auspices or guidance of the original interpreter. Therefore, with respect to this study, the American Muslim location determines the currency of authority. As such, the nature of this location and attitudes found within in it are crucial in the evaluation of what is authoritative. The demographic currents, attitudes on gender relations, and gender inclusivity in the American Muslim location all matter when discussing the potential for women's religious leadership, and they form the basis of the framework I propose here to study American Muslim women's claims to religious authority. The specific issues regarding the nature of Islam in America which come in to consideration when theorizing the authoritative claims of Mattson and Wadud are gender and race.

While I rely on Weber's definition of authority, and Abou El Fadl's discussion of the formation of the authoritative and legitimate, authority and legitimacy are very different from the concept of leadership. Catherine Wessinger makes the distinction between leadership and authority through their discussion of Protestant American womens transitions from playing authoritative roles in the 19th an early 20th centuries to assuming roles of ritual and ordained leadership. With respect to American womens religious leadership, Wessinger agrees that charisma brings authority. More than an affable personality trait, charisma "enables women to found religious institutions and inspire movements that are outside the patriarchal mainstream religions."[9] Charisma is the ability to found an empowering discourse within a community. However charisma as the source of womens authority does not usually encourage organized work to reform social structures that oppress women and other groups. Unless additional factors are

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[8]Abou El Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 107.

[9]Catherine Wessinger, "Women's Religious Leadership in the United States" in *Religious Institutions and Women's Leadership: New Roles Inside the Mainstream*, ed. Catherine Wessinger (Columbia, South Carolina Press, 1996), 5.

present, the increased institutionalization of a religious group founded by a charismatic woman results in a shift to male leadership.[10] In other words the discourse of empowerment is never enough. Even if it is foundational to a social movement, such as the effects of Waduds scholarship on Muslim discourse on gender, a "social expectation of equality" is necessary to sustain womens religious authority. The ability to shape social expectations in any direction is then what underlies what we can call leadership. Leadership relies on popular acceptance, is practical, and can be located in time and place, while authority remains intellectual or theoretical, based on popularity and strength of discourse. The success of leadership always can be measured but the popularity of an authority figure is fleeting.

Wessinger treats religious authority as an individuals claim to religious agency and it need not be authoritative or popular. The sources of religious authority for women are responsibilities placed on them from God and scriptural knowledge.[11] The sources of leadership are the office, institution, and formalized recognition. Neither of these confirms the issue of popularity or widespread approval.

The distinction between authority, which anyone can possess, and leadership, which only those in office can possess, is entirely appropriate for contexts in which leadership includes roles of representative of the community and ability to lead rituals. For many American Christian and Jewish communities in which women hold positions of leadership, the natural progression from recognition of womens religious authority to roles of leadership has been through ordination. However, for the case of American Muslim women, in addition to the binary of religious authority and religious leadership, a third category must be added to account for the fact that in Muslim communities women have filled positions in office that exclude the function of leading rituals. I call this institutional leadership. It circumvents the legal questions of the permissibility of women leading others in prayer, supplication, and delivering sermons; however it is a role that may be invested with publically recognized religious authority on the level of

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[10]Wessinger, 5.

[11]Wessinger, 9-10

being a consultant. Examples of women in this category would be the respected female MSA president, elected for her organizational skills and well known piety, or ISNA executives, such as Ingrid Mattson and others. The Muslim woman chaplain blurs these categories once again as they are trained to deliver sermons, lead women in prayer, and lead Muslims and non-Muslims in supplication, but cannot lead mixed-gender congregational prayers.

One must ask, how Mattson and Wadud claim religious authority in a tradition dominated by immigrant men, and how do they construct authority and leadership for women, including themselves, from Islamic principles that are informed by American Islam. Considering that both are converts to Islam, one must also ask what are the factors that lead to Mattson's acceptance and Wadud's marginalization in mainstream discourse. Mattson has a community, namely in ISNA as well as her prescriptive role as director of the Muslim chaplaincy program at Hartford Seminary, which has the potential for being her interpretive community. That is, her interpretations not only shape gender discourses, but her community has a vested interest in her interpretations, given that she has been chosen as its leader above other privileged immigrant males. Wadud, on the other hand, has publicly assumed only momentary roles of ritual leadership, and has said her marginalization is largely due to her race and being an African-American woman attempting to engage in a discourse that has been the domain of non-black men. However, she is authoritative insofar as she commands readership among scholars and lay intellectuals concerned with gender equality in Muslim texts, particularly the Qur'an, and Muslim communities, even though it does not function as an interpretive community.

While it is a point of practicality that implementation of one's interpretations of gender reform in Muslim discourse is dependent upon the existence of interpretive communities, ultimately the role of the interpretive community in creating religious authority is merely a description of its popularity, and not necessarily its scholarly merit. As Abou El Fadl further points out, there have been instances of collective mistakes or moments when communities have not been thoroughly rigorous in their

standards for determining the authenticity of an idea.[12] Thus placing importance on past interpretive communities, or romanticizing a time of perfection as the Salafis do with respect to the opinions of companions of the prophet, is misguided. Additionally, current consensus in interpretive communities may also be in error. This creates even more emphasis on considerations of historical context and location in rigorous interpretation.

1.2 Existing and New Paradigms of Studying American Muslim Women

With special attention to gender, I have divided scholarship on American Muslims into three categories. The first is scholarship by American religions historians which attempts to incorporate Muslim immigrant narratives and Muslim institutional history into American religious history as an extension of the assimilation that all religious traditions have undergone with their arrival in the United States because of the exceptional nature of religion in America. American religious history treatments of Muslims in America usually fragment a continuous narrative of Muslims in America by dividing African-American Muslim and immigrant Muslim histories and even failing to acknowledge the sizable contingency of Muslim slaves. These studies usually draw on the second category of scholarship, which is the work of Islamicists who have chronicled Muslim immigration and presence in the United States and the establishment of American Muslim institutions as a move toward assimilation. These studies are not necessarily focused on the American context as much as they assume what the American context requires of Muslims with regard to assimilation. They focus on the Shari'a and Americanization paradigms and also have a fragmented view of Muslims in America as they heavily focus on immigrants and privileged immigrant understandings of how to prac-

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[12]Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 114.

tice Islam in America over African-American ones. Both the first and second categories of works largely marginalize Muslim women's community narratives and participation in American Muslim institutions. The third category of scholarship is relatively newer and considers Islam as an American religion, not because of assimilation but because of indigenous expressions of Muslim identity. The last group of works is critical of the previous attempts at theorizing American Muslim history as a continuous narrative, but still do not treat gender discourses substantively.

A survey of histories written on religion in America by two prominent American religion historians, Peter Williams and Catherine Albanese, contextualizes Islam as a foreign religion that "Americans have the greatest difficulty in understanding."[13] They essentialize the teachings of Islam, assuming that it reveals something about American Muslims' practices, and conclude on this basis the reasons for which American Muslims have trouble in assimilating to American culture.[14] Finally, they bungle the story of when Islam becomes part of the American religious landscape by separating Black Muslim history from immigrant Muslim history and failing to mention Muslim slaves.

There are two major American Muslim narratives that appear in their works: immigrant and African-American. The discussion of Muslim presence vis-a-vis immigration is obvious. Albanese in particular lays out the dates of major immigration patterns and where Muslim immigrants originated.[15] She and Williams provide a layout of the origins of Islam and how Muslims have had to adapt their traditions to the American context. Williams explains the tenets of Islam and the five pillars of Islam in bullet point form, and then discusses the challenges American Muslims have in their adjustment to life in the U.S., both because of new types of gender roles and sites of prayer.[16]

This analysis contains some nuances of the complex nature of the American Muslim

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[13]Peter Williams, *America's Religions: From their Origins to the Twenty-first Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 448.

[14]Catherine Albanese, *America, Religions, and Religion* (Belmont: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 2006), 298 and Williams, 450-452.

[15]Albanese, 295.

[16]Williams, 450-453.

community but is seeped in essentialism, as if one can teach about an entire demographic of Muslim Americans through the basic tenets of their faith, in this case the five pillars of Islam. It ignores the fact that American Muslims (or other Muslims) have particular kinds of relationships with the teachings of Islam that are based on their world views, life experiences, social and historical contexts, and that American Muslims have multiple ways in which they incorporate Islam into their lives (or do not). It ignores the fact that American Muslims are made up of a heterogeneous group of people and that the five pillars of Islam simply do not encapsulate much about Muslims' beliefs or American Muslim practices. Including a paragraph as Williams does on the existence of sects in Islam, such as Sunnis and Shi'is, hardly resolves this issue.[17]

However, African-American narratives appear much more haphazardly. Williams and Albanese, and in a volume called *Religion in American Life*, Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Balmer implicitly recognize that Islam may have been present in the U.S. before immigration through mentioning of the Nation of Islam, however only as a part of the civil rights movement.[18] Williams and Butler, et al., hint that some African slaves may have been Muslim, never mind the substantial evidence discussed in works by Allan Austin and others that some forty thousand slaves in the U.S. were Muslim.[19]

Although from the 1960s Williams and other scholars of American religions began the call for including narratives of Americans from religious traditions other than Christianity, with respect to American Muslims this call has been fulfilled only on a cursory level if at all. As late as 1987, the fourth edition of *Religion in America* by Winthrop Hudson does not even have indexed the terms Islam, Muslim, Nation of Islam, Arabs, or any other descriptors that would imply that Muslims are present in the America. The reference to Elijah Muhammad is not part of a story of the heritage of

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[17]Williams, 455.

[18]Jon Butler, *Religion in American Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 371-375

[19]Allan Austin, *African Muslims in Antebellum America: Transatlantic Stories and Spiritual Struggles* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 22.

African-American Islam; rather it is mentioned in the context of Black social movements, Black Power, and social change in their section on Black Churches. Although within the field of American religious history there is a tension regarding how inclusive the field must be of other traditions, given the overwhelming effect of Protestantism in American religious culture, one explanation for the underdeveloped, fragmented, or missing treatment of Muslims in America in survey histories of American religion is the shortage of collaborative frameworks which situate Islam in the American religious landscape. The language with which we can talk about American Muslims outside the frameworks of immigration or Americanization is missing.

In the second category of literature on American Muslims, Islamicists who focus on American Muslim history do not consider the theoretical frameworks and categories of inquiry in American Religions that would be helpful in understanding the range of American Muslim experiences. Their focus on the history of Muslim presence in America may be helpful to histories of American religions but misplaces emphasis on the immigrant narrative and establishment of American Muslim institutions such as MSA (Muslim Student's Association) and ISNA. This discussion is heavily male centered and gender does not feature until immigrants in 1965 import wives into the United States. It is important to note here that the narratives of African-American Muslim women, who had been present all along, are deprivileged and lost in this framing as the ensuing discussion about gender in American Muslim communities takes place within the confines of the immigrant family. This context is particularly important when we discuss Amina Wadud's marginalization in mainstream gender discourses. Wadud says that not only is the family structure of immigrant Muslims often different from that of African-American families, causing a loss in nuance in discussion on American Muslim families, but the construct of family itself within which gender is discussed serves to reinforce the idea that Muslim women are always dependent beings, and never individuals. Studies that do focus on American Muslim women as their own category are largely concerned with assimilation and women's exposure to American lifestyles, and feminist ideas thereby focusing on them as subjects of Shari'a and subjects of the fam-

ily.

Scholars such as Yvonne Haddad and John Esposito, whose works have been important forerunners in scholarship on American Muslims, recognize that there are particulars in the American context that shape American Islam and Muslim life in the U.S., and also explore a wide range of issues including gender, family life, education, and mosque life. Other scholars such as Jane Smith, Ilyas Ba-Yunus, and Kasim Kone, draw comparisons between Muslim experience in the United States and the Muslim world regarding gender relations, contributing to the East/West dichotomy and further alienating Muslims from the American context as transplants from elsewhere. The focus of their studies is on demands placed on Muslim women with respect to hijab, arranged marriage, and duties toward the family.

The dominating concern in most of their studies with respect to gender is how Muslims, mostly as culture shocked immigrants rather than as Muslim Americans, may or may not be on an Americanization path by struggling to incorporate strict rules regarding women in the Shari'a into their lives and by extension, adapting to American life. This formulation is problematic in three ways. First, it ignores nuances within Islamic law that Muslims grapple with and assumes Islamic law is static and impossible to follow in the United States. Second, it fails to locate women's agency in interpreting Islamic law and their engagements with the Qur'an and hadith, and the exegetical and legal traditions, either in a scholarly or lay capacity. This precludes any possibility of discussing women's claims to religious authority and their interpretation of the religious tradition. It ignores the possibility that women may not be struggling to incorporate an impossible and outdated system, rather they may be actively interpreting the system or in the very least challenging the assumptions underlying it. And third, it does not sufficiently discuss what Americanization means and what forces are at play in changing gender dynamics in American Muslim communities.

So does Americanization of Islam or Muslims happen and if so, how? The question problematically implies that Islam undergoes a process of Americanization to qualify as an American religion, a contentious issue when considering African American and

other indigenous American Muslims whose only context in recent memory is American. In more recent studies, scholars in the field of American Muslim history (my third category), Edward Curtis, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, and others have theorized that Islam *is* American. In this thesis I will redirect this question to explore the ways in which American Muslim communities, controversies, and discourses are an expression of Islam in America as an American religion. I position my argument regarding the incorporation of theoretical frameworks from American Religious History by relying on scholars of American religions, Thomas Tweed and Stephen Prothero's assertion that Asian Religions in America undergo certain American transformations; I ask whether this applies to Islam in America –or whether there is such a thing as "American Islam"–because American Muslims' conceptions of Islam are informed by their presence in the religious landscape and historical context of America.

The emergence of American Muslim women's religious and institutional leadership, such as that of Ingrid Mattson, chaplaincy positions held by Muslim women in higher education, the army, and prison systems, the scholarly activist engagements with Qur'an, hadith, and Islamic law by Muslim feminist scholars located in the U.S., and finally the prescriptive roles which women take on in their capacities as teachers and administrators in local Islamic schools, are all roles that are indicative of shifting paradigms of religious leadership and authority across American Muslim communities. While they do not form a single movement, and certainly disagree on approaches to gender debates, the work of these women cannot be contextualized within a simplistic model of Americanization as assimilation or through discussions on how strict laws of Shari'a are incorporated in American Muslim life. Rather these women's engagements are at once American and Muslim expressions.

1.3   American Religions Frameworks and the American Religious Landscape

Before I focus on the frameworks of religious history and race and gender discourses in America, I will discuss below other frameworks, from American historiographies of religion that form the basis of American exceptionalism, the idea that religion in America has unique characteristics only found in the United States by virtue of the history of its founding and expansion, and its social and political ideals. Throughout the thesis I will make reference to these frameworks, as the discussion of Mattson and Wadud on openings for women in Muslim religious authority demonstrates how American Muslim discourses reflect or do not reflect the historical character of religion in America. These four frameworks are: democratization of religious leadership and popularization of religious life, congregational models of organization of religious communities in America, volunteerism and the voluntary nature of participation in religious activities, and finally Protestantization and civil religion's influences on non-protestant traditions in America.

Democratization is the popularization of religious authority to include popular leaders. Nathan Hatch's discussion in *Democratization of American Christianity* is now considered a classic in the field of American Religious History and explores through the emergence of five protestant denominations in the 18th and 19th centuries how an inversion of the nature of authority in which grassroots leaders and common folk became powerful figures in the emergence and preservation of various protestant traditions. The lens of democratization is likewise useful in studying how within the American Muslim community lay intellectuals and grassroots leaders, often with little training in exegetical or legal sciences, emerged as American Muslim religious authority. Although as I discussed above, scholars such as Khaled About El Fadl criticize the lack of expertise among the religious elite in the United States, democratization created an opening for non-elite, or unconventional parties to speak authoritatively. This usually excludes women, but on a theoretical level there is greater direct access to authority, or at the

very least, an opening for women to claim authoritative space.

Whether women are participants in democratization of religious authority in American Muslim communities is a subject for ethnographic study. However, according to Ihsan Bagby's study of American mosques from the year 2000, two-thirds of all American mosques officially allow women to serve on their boards of directors, while half of all mosques have had women serve in the last five years.[20] The study does not indicate whether mosques considered women serving as the principals of Islamic schools associated with the mosque as a position on the board of directors for the mosque at large. Such an inclusion would certainly inflate the number of women serving in roles of authority, since heading Islamic schools is a common and largely acceptable role for women to assume. Ultimately, an analysis of the qualifications of the women who have served in comparison to that of the men on the boards would determine to what extent the framework of democratization is helpful in describing potential for women in roles of leadership.

The second framework, congregationalism, is an organizational model of communities. Popular Muslim authority in the United States is largely organized through congregations, or mosque communities; the figures of religious authority are the imams of mosques, members of boards of directors or committees at mosques. Recognizing this organizational factor, which is parallel to communities centered around churches, synagogue, and temples, is key to recognizing the sites of negotiation with authority on the popular level. American religions historian Mark Chaves argues in his book, *Congregations in America*, that while religious communities need not organize into congregations, in the United States congregations are the dominant way religious communities set up their religious functions, social, and educational structures: "Whatever their historical and sociological origins, congregations are predominantly the way in which American religion is socially organized."[21] For Chaves, congregations are the

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[20]Ihsan Bagby et. al., *The Mosque in America: A National Portrait. A Report from the National Mosque Study Project* (Washington DC: Council on American-Islamic Relations, 2001), 56.

[21]Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3.

sites of cultural activity and preservation of the religious community in a competitive religious and secular marketplace of beliefs. This runs true for American Muslim communities as well; they establish Islamic centers or mosques, and Islamic schools, which become crucial places for the mediation and prescription of Muslim identity. The concept of being a member of a particular mosque, and by extension sometimes having a choice of mosques to attend based on preferences of level of legal observance, particular gender relations climate, or ethnic demographic, creates a sense of community associated with the mosque. As Chaves theorizes, that community space becomes the product of social negotiation on the part of the organizers of the community. Women's space within the mosque, their level of active participation, and potential leadership of community activities are expressions of the overall character of the congregation assembled around the mosque.

As the category of congregations is useful in studying authority and community dynamics, it is also useful to study the limitations of the congregation and distinguish the gender debates that take place outside of congregations. However, according to the Bagby study, some 4 million American Muslims out of the estimated 6-8 million American Muslim population are "unmosqued." This does not necessarily mean that they are not religious or do not have a stake in religious gender debates. Perhaps they choose not to be members of any mosques because of sectarian, theological, or political disagreements with the local mosques as interpretive communities. Closely related to this is the fact that long term forms of religious authority, as opposed to momentary forms of authority such as the role of imam for the duration of prayer, need an interpretive community to be viable. As I discussed above, although Amina Wadud has assumed momentary roles of religious authority such as *khatibah* (person who delivers a sermon or *khutbah*) or imamah, for her to be adopted as an *'alimah* by more than just individuals reading her work would require her to have an organized community that attempts to practice her prescriptions or puts her teachings at the center of their practices. Her example helps us pose the question whether or not women as authority figures can be part of communities that take their scholarship and input seriously and

constructively.

Closely related to democratization and congregationalism is volunteerism in American religious communities. Because of the secularity of the American nation state, the extent to which Muslims choose to incorporate Islam in their lives, notwithstanding familial or community pressures, is voluntary (though there is debate as to how secular the United States is and how free Americans are not to practice religion given the common Protestant Christian observances and practices that pervade American society). Whether people go to the mosque or not, or decide to manage their affairs using Islamic law or ethics, there is an element of choice in practice. As such, the element of commitment, or volunteerism, on the part of Muslims is crucial for the perpetuation and preservation of Muslim identity. The commitment of women in particular is important as they are often held responsible for cultural reproduction. If the voluntary participation of women is important for subsequent generations to maintain Muslim self-understanding, then the forms in which that participation takes place are up for debate, as are issues of the extent of their participation, how they are represented in the broader community, and whether they can speak for the community as leaders.

Finally, the theory of Protestantization of American religions ties in the above three frameworks. In a reference to Will Herberg's 1955 book *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, Bruce Lawrence says that America "is a consensus-seeking society, with a strong religious catalyst driving the nature of the consensus sought. America, meaning USA, has blended both Catholics and Jews into some version of Protestant American religious belief and practice."[22] Lawrence agrees with Herberg in that the dominant religious discourse in the United States is and will continue to be Protestant Christian. Robert Bellah defines American civil religion as the public religious dimension to politics and American life which draws on a general idea of God and faith-based ethics through symbols and rituals.[23] For many American religions historians the essence of American religion,

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[22]Bruce Lawrence, *New Faiths, Old Fears: Muslims and Other Asian Immigrants in American Religious Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 36.

[23]Bellah Robert Bellah "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96, no. 1 (1967): 4.

participation in civil religion by all religious communities, and Protestantization refers more to

> American notions of polity (separation of church and state, along with patriotic fervor) and society (freedom over equality, support for voluntary groups) and economy (frontier capitalism, with creativity and wealth equally prized) than to any set of globally consonant norms and values.[24]

Catherine Albanese, R. Laurence Moore, Peter Berger, and others have discussed the force of protestantization, with or without using the term, of minority or new religious traditions in America. Through their organization into congregations, their democratization of communities and religious leaders, the voluntary nature of their participation in religious communities, and their participation in American civil religion, they mirror the Protestant model of religion in America. The result of Americanization of religions is patriotic participation in civil society, freedom of religion, volunteerism, and capitalism, including competition in a marketplace of religious traditions.

For the case of Jews and Catholics Americanization means that,"American Jews have more in common with American Protestants than they do with European Jews, that American Catholics have more in common with their Protestant and Jewish compatriots than they do with Catholics in Ireland or Italy, Poland, or Brazil, that even American Protestants do not look like their counterparts in Ireland, Scotland, Britain, and Germany."[25] Lawrence extends the same analogy to Americans following Asian religions, including Islam: "American Muslims will have more in common with American Protestants, Catholics, and Jews than with Saudi or Egyptian, Afghani, or Malay Muslims [...]'."[26] I contend that although this may not happen on all grounds, American Muslim scholarly and lay contributions to Muslim gender debates are born out of Islamic thought and either operate or are generated in an American context.

For the case Bruce Lawrence's discussion opens the possibilities of looking at Muslims in Amer-

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[24]Lawrence, 37.

[25]Lawrence, 37.

[26]Lawrence, 37.

ica as a racial category in a conversation on American diversity. Even though American Muslims are comprised of multiple ethnicities, looking at them as a whole racial category enables scholars to address all American Muslims at once. This also opens numerous possibilities for studying intersectionality of class, gender relations, and other issues that are shaped by national origin of immigrants in a comparative model within the American Muslim community. However, if we shift the focus on diversity within Muslims, as opposed to Muslims compared to other groups in America, it highlights racial differences and fissures within the community in a real way.

We can perhaps collapse the American Muslim community into one racial category as Lawrence suggests, much the same way as Jewish Americans have been considered one ethnic category in many discourses; however, it assumes a kind of unity in the form of an American *Ummah*, as Jamillah Karim has called. It is also the kind of unity which Sherman Jackson, and (more related to my point) Amina Wadud say is missing from American Muslims because of racist tendencies within the community. Wadud has personally experienced the rejection of her scholarship and positions on gender in Islam as inauthentic by American Muslims, who cite her race as an indication that she is not following the true Islam; rather, they say, she follows a strange African-American, or Nation of Islam type of belief. As such, we may be able to collapse multiple immigrant races into a Muslim ummah, but at the risk of excluding African-American Muslims who comprise of at least half of all Muslims in America. African-American histories and experiences are not comparable to immigrant ones.

In addition to comparisons within the community, the question of protestantization of the American Muslim community and the categorization of them into a racial category suggests comparison between American Muslim women and their counterparts in other traditions. There are a number of points of comparison considering engagements with feminism, particularly with respect to women and religious authority such as women's ordination movements, development of feminist theology, women being elected to lead congregations, and more. How much of our analysis ought to be in a comparative model?

According to Anne Braude, Americanists have started to recognize feminist theology as a very American feature of religion in the United States. Catherine Brekus says the field of religious studies is no longer the same and must consider the work of feminist theologians such as Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, Judith Plaskow, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and others.[27] Sadly, these considerations seldom take into account Muslim feminist critique, possibly because such a position is inconceivable to them. The trouble with comparisons with Jewish and Christian feminist theology is that there is a de-privilaging of Muslim voices that state Muslim women both in America and globally are simply behind or are following in the footsteps of their Abrahamic sisters; this undermines the struggles in each religious context and specific challenges that arise in the Muslim contexts. The relationship of American Muslim women's theological writings with feminism is important to consider outside the comparison with other traditions. One must consider feminism as an outlook, a particular position with respect to theology that any number of religious communities, including Muslims, can draw on for gender discourse.

How or on what grounds are Muslim gender debates, and more specifically American Muslim women's functions as religious authority, more similar to expressions found in other American religious communities rather than in non-American Muslim communities? The question is not whether they are more American than Muslim, rather in what ways are they distinctively American, if at all. In framing the works of Mattson and Wadud, as I stated above, their context of race in America and engagements with religious gender debates remain distinctive American elements, compared to their counterparts elsewhere. This is not to say that Muslims engaged in gender debates elsewhere are not concerned with the terms of feminism or are not dealing with discourses of racial difference. Rather, these two issues in particular within an American historical context shape the discourses of Mattson and Wadud. Both women are North

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[27]Catherine Brekus "Introduction: Searching for Women in Narratives of American Religious History" in *The Religious History of American Women: Reimagining the Past*, ed. Catherine Brekus (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 1-50.

American; they are not only socially and immediately located in the United States, they are not immigrants to the continent. I emphasize that being part of the American religious landscape has shaped Mattson's and Wadud's self-understandings of what it means to be Muslim, and views on Muslim gender relations. This environment, along with how they are situated in their communities, informs their reading of Islam itself.

Although the four American religious history frameworks of democratization, volunteerism, congregationalism, and Protestantization lack particulars which are specific to Islam, they historically contextualize Islam within the American religious landscape. Additionally the frameworks of race relations in America and feminism in American religions provide us with tools for a more nuanced analysis of what Americanization of Muslim communities really means, and more specifically, which aspects of the American religious landscape pertains to shifts in Muslim women's claims to prescriptive roles of religious authority. We can reflect on the unique social and historical moment for Muslim women in the United States in which they are claiming religious authority and re-reading the tradition with an eye towards gender egalitarianism, using a combination of theoretical frameworks that uses the post-colonial context of following Islamic law, and also through a paradigm of inquiry that situates American Muslim history in the broader context of American religious history.

Chapter 2

'Alimah or *Imamah*: Diverging Ideas on Muslim Women's Religious Authority

In this chapter I will discuss the approaches of two scholars, Ingrid Mattson and Amina Wadud, on Qur'anic scholarship, gender debates, and visions of Muslim women's leadership. It is the purpose of this chapter to explore how these scholars consolidate their ideas on gender debates with religious authority and leadership, how they discuss their own claims to religious authority, and how they contextualize their social and historical location. This discussion lends itself to a further investigation of the contextualizing factors of engagements with feminism and discourses on race in American in the next chapter.

Mattson and Wadud are both American Muslim convert women, scholars, professors, and have made significant contributions to gender discourses on women's leadership and religious authority. In an interview with Geneive Abdo, Mattson has described her general approach as "religiously conservative" and "legal modernist."[1] In her book, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Women's Reform in Islam*, Wadud writes, "I consider myself

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[1] Geneive Abdo, *Mecca and Main Street: Muslim Life in America After 9/11* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 152.

a pro-faith, pro-feminist Muslim woman." What do the terms "religiously conservative" and "legal modernist" mean in themselves and in relation to "pro-faith" and "pro-feminist" and vice versa? Being a legal modernist yet maintaining a religiously conservative position indicates Mattson's commitment to classical methodologies for reforms in Islamic discourses and law that reflect the modern circumstances. Wadud's pro-faith stance is her dedication to God and Islamic notions of justice while pursuing scholarship and activism that reaffirms gender and racial equality. She recalls, "I was raised not only to link conceptions of the divine with justice, but also to link notions of justice with the divine."[2] She searches for justice on the basis of her faith. Both of these positions are the product of great deliberation on part of Mattson and Wadud with respect to the contexts they situate themselves in and what kind of conversations they claim their projects are part of. In the next sections will discuss the nuances in the language of Wadud's and Mattson's positions that show their own ambivalence toward their situating contexts.

2.0.1 Wadud the Pro-feminist, Pro-faith *'Alimah*

Wadud began her career as pro-feminist, pro-faith scholar without those labels and a desire to approach the Qur'an directly. The text itself was central to her decision to convert to Islam as it provided for her a path to which she could reconcile her identities as a black, American, woman with a desire for spiritual fulfillment. She also poured her scholarly prowess into reading the text and eventually producing *Qur'an and Woman*, one of the first scholarly monographs on feminist critiques of Qur'anic hermeneutics.

Wadud's main approach to the Qur'an is a search for Divine justice and ethical and moral compulsion for human beings to enact Divine justice on earth. In her view, human understanding of justice as well as Islamic thought has changed throughout history and will continue to change. While the Qur'an and Prophet's sunnah have always

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[2]Amina Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad: Woman's Reform in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 4.

been the source of justice for many Muslims, they have read these foundational sources through the lens of their historical and social context. She says that Muslims need to "engag[e] meaningfully with the Islamic intellectual tradition. This must be done in concert with ongoing interpretation of the two predetermined sources [Qur'an and Sunnah] along with modern global discourse and civilizational movements" of which gender justice is a part.[3] Muslims can reinterpret the Qur'an,"by first admitting that concepts of Islam and concepts of justice have always been relative to actual historical and cultural situations."[4]

Her hermeneutical methodology in approaching the Qur'an is to look at the text as a whole and read verses pertaining to creation, gender, and gender relations in light of the Qur'an's *weltanschauung*, or world view, which is based on the attributes of God, including justice. Like other modernist thinkers Wadud's inquiry into gender in Islam led her straight to the Qur'an, with limited engagements with *hadith* and tafsir, although she does draw on classical tafsir that posit sexist interpretations of particular verses in atomistic or isolated fashion, which in her view have become synonymous with the text of the Qur'an.[5] Her justification of a Qur'an-only approach is that "it is indispensable to women's empowerment that they apply their experiences to interpretations of the sources when they participate in development and reform of Muslim politics [...] Qur'anic values and virtues inspire persistence in the struggle and resistance to the limitations put on women's full human dignity."[6] In other words, to perform acts of direct engagement with the sacred text by women is to gain representation of women in scholarship and is a matter of practicality, since appeals to the Qur'an inspire Muslim values.

Drawing on Fazlur Rahman's methodologies of looking at the Qur'an historically, Wadud asserts that the Qur'an proposes certain reforms while creating a trajectory of

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[3]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 2.

[4]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 2.

[5]Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman*, 2.

[6]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 7, 15.

other reforms through non-binding prohibitions or verses that encourage certain social expectations. The primary example of the trajectory argument is slavery in the Qur'an: there is no explicit prohibition of slavery in the text, but there are several verses that regulate slavery practices in favor of mercy upon slaves and encourage manumission of slaves. In a contemporary world in which slavery is legally prohibited, scholars routinely claim that the Qur'an intended abolition and thus our collective decision to ban slavery is supported by the Qur'an. Wadud extends this same argument to gender equality in the Qur'an. In addition to verses which show explicit gender parity, verses which are ambiguous with respect to equality in social relations are prefaced or followed by terms of mercy and kindness towards those who are weaker. This is evidence of the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* as justice, mercy, and kindness for all human beings. She discusses gender egalitarianism in the Qur'an in all three realms of life: in creation, in temporal life or the *dunya* and in the eyes of God on the Day of Judgment.[7]

Exegetically Wadud has the most difficulty in reading Qur'anic verses on social gender relations in the temporal world. Throughout her career she has wrestled with difficult verses that have challenged her hermeneutical skills. In particular, her method has changed over time with respect to verse 4:34, which states that men are *qawwamuna 'ala* women, or are protectors or maintainers of women because they are preferred or *tafdil* by God; it also states that husbands can *daraba*, or hit their wives from whom they fear *nushuz* or rebellion. In *Qur'an and Women* Wadud makes the case that even if we keep the classical interpretation, *qiwama* of men over women is their responsibility for caring and maintaining women in a financial sense, *qiwama* is not necessarily gender specific. In a situation in which women are financially stronger, they are *qawwamat*

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[7]Riffat Hasan has an even more comprehensive discussion on creation in the Qur'an, incorporating *hadith* literature that suggested that Adam's wife was subordinate to Adam as he was made for him and by his crooked rib, which was read into the text of the Qur'an even though it is absent. Mattson agrees that the use of folklore associated with the *Israiliyat*, extra-Qur'anic stories of Hebrew prophets, for the purpose of tafsir has produced narrow readings of verses related to women. However she is sympathetic to why Muslims cannot discredit the Israiliyat altogether: "this is not necessarily because these Muslims want to retain the misogynistic narratives found in tafsirs, but because they find other value in many of the stories of the prophets." (Ingrid Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an: its History and Place in Muslim Life* [Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008], 194.).

'ala men and have preference (*faddalat*), or in situations in which women are financially independent, such as women heads of household in the United States (a particularly American situation which informs her reading of the verse) there is no *qiwama*. She opens the possibilities of interpretations of *qiwama* and *faddala* to include women's ability to bear and raise children as the favors given to them over men. Therefore for Wadud, *qiwama* and *tafdil* are expressions of "the collective good concerning the relationship between men and women in society at large" or the range of things with which some people are endowed and meant to share with those who do not possess those qualities.[8]

With respect to *daraba*, in *Qur'an and Woman* Wadud says that the term has multiple meanings not limited to striking. It can mean to set an example or to strike out on a journey; but most of all, the verb form *daraba* when contrasted with the second form of the same verb, *darraba*, functions as a prohibition against excessive physical violence against women, which may have been common at the time of the Qur'anic revelation. This hint at curbing violence is an example of the trajectory argument which appeals to the Qur'anic *weltanschauung* of mercy and justice, especially considering that within the verse it is a last resort after admonishing and separating beds. However, for Wadud, this earlier explanation of hers was not satisfying, as the text of the Qur'an still states to *daraba* wives who are in a state of *nushuz*, despite it being a last resort and classically interpreted as having limits.

She revisits the verse in *Inside the Gender Jihad* as an enduring conundrum for Muslims who wish to read the Qur'an with a lens of gender equity. She discusses the process by which she arrives at her final interpretation of the verse:

> Whatever sexism might be found in the immutable Qur'an is a reflection of the historical context of Qur'anic revelation [...] ultimately, we can exercise the continued progression of human agency and rewrite the basic paradigmatic core of what can be considered Islamic ethics by a multiplicity of means now available to human understanding about what it means to ac-

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[8]Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 72.

quire, practice, and assert how we live as ethical beings and moral agents of the divine will.[9]

In other words, interpretation of the Qur'an is a continuous process in which the current sense of Islamic ethics is built upon that of the previous generation of Qur'anic interpreters.

She says that there are stages of interpretation of the Qur'an that are congruent with stages of the history of the text. With respect to *daraba* in 4:34, the first stage is the context and world view in which interpreters said, "yes, it is allowed," with the Prophetic *hadith* serving as a discouraging caveat: "'I wanted one thing and Allah wanted something else.'"[10] In the second stage of interpretation, exegetes said "yes," it is allowed, but with stipulations." This represents the legal position on wife-beating by exegetes such as Al-Shafi'i, who recognized its legality but interpreted the verse as limiting the strikes as non-violent and avoiding the face, as the Prophet is also reported to have said.[11] Wadud's initial position resembled this one – that the verse served as a prohibition against unrestrained violence, but with the addition of a trajectory argument that states the Qur'an intended to limit and therefore eventually abolish wife-beating.

The third possibility, which she now proposes in *Inside the Gender Jihad*, is in keeping with belief in the *tawhidic* paradigm, or looking at belief in the unity of God as a moral and ethical call to human beings as *khilafa*, or moral agents. As such she says we can question the meaning of the verse and say hitting is "perhaps not" the meaning of it. Her final tool is saying 'no' to the traditional interpretation of the verse of the permissibility of hitting one's wife. This "exemplifies the process or trajectory throughout the history of textual interpretation and application[because] we are the makers of textual meaning. The results of our meaning-making is the reality we estab-

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[9]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 205.

[10]quoted in *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 202.

[11]Kecia Ali, "'The best of you will not strike': Al-Shafii on Quran, Sunnah, and Wife-Beating," *Comparative Islamic Studies* 2, no. 2006 (2008): 147.

lish from those meanings to human experiences and social justice."[12] Not only does she apply the idea of trajectory in terms of speculating on the intentions of the Qur'an, but she also says that because historically interpretation of the Qur'an has been a series of negotiations with the text, we are ultimately able to build a trajectory on human attempts to find meaning in the text.

This last step is a difficult leap to make, especially if saying no to the text implies a simple rejection of the verse based on human intolerance of certain elements in the Qur'anic text. If this method is systematically applied, then the relevance and centrality of the text can be undermined. We must ask, whether a systematic methodology is desirable or achievable in the first place. For Wadud it is possible to take historicity of the text to the level of rejecting certain practices dating to the 7th century, including slavery and wife-beating on the basis of our developed sense of ethics. While Wadud says this sense of ethics is from the tawhidic paradigm and is therefore a faith-based, or pro-faith approach, saying no to *daraba* in verse 4:34 is a method drawing on a trajectory of human understanding of the text, which is relative and need not be egalitarian. In other words, even though at all times interpretation of the Qur'an is a human endeavor; there is no assurance or commitment to interpreting tawhidic justice as gender egalitarian. Furthermore she admits that "no interpretation is definitive."[13] She interprets herself into a corner: she prefaces her discussion on 4:34 she says that her reading is just as valid as other readings, which is a position that appreciates plurality but creates a space in which everyone has valid readings of the Qur'an, including those who disagree on gender equity in social relations at this time or in the future. It begins a circular argument of acknowledging everyone's position such that discourses of reform cease to be constructive or meaningful.

Wadud's saying no to the Qur'an complicates her pro-faith stance because it is an argument based on her sense of Islamic ethics, yet it does not discredit her other faith-based arguments. This is also the point at which Wadud's Qur'an-only approach

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[12]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 204.

[13]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 199.

proves limiting. While there are multiple, and according to her, equally valid interpretations to be drawn from the Qur'an, a look at *hadith* and *sunnah* provides some direction in narrowing down the possibilities of interpretation. Omid Safi has argued in that in Muslim memory Muhammad serves as much more than a vessel for the transmission of the Qur'an for humanity; rather he "lives the Qur'an, he embodies the Qur'an, and as his wife said, his nature *is* the Qur'an."[14] Thus, *akhlaq an-Nabi*, or Muhammadan ethics, forms an integral part of interpreting the text of the Qur'an. This lens of interpreting the Qur'an specifically for prescriptions originates with two questions. The first is "how would we act if at all times we were mindful of being with God" as the Muhammadan ethics suggests.[15] The second question is "what would Muhammad do."[16] Applying these two questions to verse 4:34 would render *daraba* inconceivable, not through considering the lack of contemporary applicability or change in social ethics (as there continue to be Muslim and non-Muslim examples of marital violence) but rather through understanding of Islamic and Qur'anic ethics as embodied by the Prophet, himself. In fact this method of *tafsir*, using the *hadith* to find meaning in the text has been a classical tool of exegesis for centuries. Ignoring or sidestepping it in the modernist context has caused us to lose the sense of Muhammadan ethics, and the Qur'anic embodiment by the Prophet which opens up great possibilities for gender-egalitarian readings. However, using Sunnah and *hadiths* for exegesis creates the need for stricter standards of *hadith* criticism, which scrutinize both *isnad* (chain of transmission) and *matn* (content) of *hadiths*, since the questionable authenticity of many so-called *sahih* or canonical *hadiths* is why modernists are skeptical of using that corpus in the first place.

Saying no to the Qur'an also suggests the question of what is at the center of her approach; is feminism primary, before Qur'anic ethics? Does her pro-feminism function

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[14]Omid Safi, *Memories of Muhammad: Why the Prophet Matters* (New York: HarperOne, 2009), 299.

[15]Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, 298.

[16]Safi, *Memories of Muhammad*, 299.

as a source of ethics in her approach to the Qur'an? Yet her derivation of ethics from Muslim theology and ontology, namely belief in *tawhid*, or oneness of God and *khilafa* as human moral agency, creates an exclusively pro-faith ethics through which she argues for gender equality in social relations. This is further complicated by the fact she was drawn to Islam for its potential for being engaged surrender in which human beings submit themselves to the will of God under the prescription of active reflection of human moral responsibility. Thus even though she finds inspiration from seemingly extra-Islamic sources such as discourses of feminism and racial equality in an American context, her ability to see human equality as an inherent characteristic of the Qur'anic world view casts both discourses as Islamic.

2.0.2   Mattson the (Feminist?) *'Alimah*

Mattson's book, *The Story of the Qur'an*, is written as a descriptive narrative of the Qur'an's revelation, historical context, and usage in ritual, scholarly, and artistic realms of contemporary Muslim life. She is not directly concerned with issues of gender or problematic interpretations of verses. However, several discussions in her book indicate she reads the Qur'an from the perspective in favor of improving women's rights and establishing gender equality. I contrast this approach to Wadud's decidedly pro-feminist reading of the Qur'an.

Mattson opens her introduction to the Qur'an with the story of a woman, Khawla bint Tha'laba, and her struggle for justice after her husband repudiated her by comparing his wife to his mother's behind, a common oral formula for unilateral divorce in pre-Islamic times. Although she is interested in discussing this story as an example of how the Prophet was deeply involved with his community such that God's revelation "is not a response to his concerns alone," her choice of story reveals how she thinks of the text of the Qur'an as a source of justice for women.[17]

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[17]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an* 3.

Likewise, in her discussion on the pre-Islamic Arabian context in which the Qur'an was revealed, she chooses to focus on injustices to women that the Qur'an corrected such as prostitution, female infanticide, and lack of inheritance rights. Perhaps by coincidence, her choice of examples and stories highlight the way in which the Prophet was very much concerned with gender justice, which has Divine origins. The example she uses to define the term *isnad* or chain of narration, is a *hadith* narrated by 'A'isha bint Abi Bakr, the Prophet's wife, in which she says she was lying with her legs stretched toward the qiblah, direction of prayer, in front of the Prophet while he was in prayer.[18] Although Mattson does not discuss the content of the *hadith* here, the *hadith* she chooses to illustrate the mundane point of what is a chain of transmission is a provocative one that has been used elsewhere in discussions about women's purity in Islam at all times, including during the state of menstruation, such that even the Prophet's wife, menstruating or not, was lying in front of him as he performed his prayers.

She makes another implicit commentary on gender in a discussion on *tawhid* in which Islam prohibited the Arab belief in female deities who were the daughters of God:

> Lest one think that the Qur'an considers the association of females with God to be particularly egregious due to an underlying assumption of female inferiority, it is important to realize the Qur'an is equally emphatic in rejecting the belief that God has a son [...] The real problem with believing that God has sons or daughters, then, has nothing to do with the gender of the child, but that it is a false concept that has been projected onto God.[19]

Mattson is demonstrating a three-fold point: that the pre-Islamic Arabs were polytheists and ascribed daughters to God, that there is a contrast with the idea of trinity, and that the Qur'an insists on the oneness of God; she then constructs her discussion from the starting point that there is no "underlying assumption of female inferiority" at play. Interestingly, Mattson's way of connecting pre-Islamic Arab religious belief

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[18]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an* 28.

[19]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 39.

(usually appearing as a separate discussion) with the idea of trinity (also a topic onto itself) was by way of making a seemingly out of place point about gender. She felt it is an essential point to make, when discussing how *tawhid* was constructed for Arabs by the removal of female children of God; it is not because of any biases against women in Islam.[20]

Mattson also discusses the nature of marriage in the Qur'an and the Prophetic ideal by emphasizing the point that the Prophet was married monogamously to Khadijah until her death; further, she emphasizes that his plural marriage after her death was a customary practice during his time as well as during the time of the Hebrew prophets.[21] Again, although her intention is to discuss the Qur'anic context of marriage, she succinctly addresses a major issue that critics of Islam have made without a full treatment problematizing those criticisms.

In a discussion on men's inheritance being twice that of women, she problematizes that in a modern context in which women may be the sole breadwinners of their families, or if the sons of a family have much more opportunity to make their fortune than daughters, then the unequal inheritance of men and women creates a situation of injustice. Mattson then details the arguments in favor of preserving the prescribed shares in the Qur'an that state that a primary goal of the Shari'a is to preserve the family, not mete out justice; the family is preserved by putting the burden on men, not women, to provide for their families and this is made easier by a larger inheritance for them.[22] This brings me back to my criticism of Wadud's approach of saying no to the Qur'an; even modern interpretations that are aware of gender inequality need not have a commitment to reforming seemingly unjust features of the Qur'anic text. For

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[20]Clearly, any scholar, man or woman, could have decided to use these examples, and indeed Mattson's general introduction to the Qur'an and its history does use examples that are not related to gender topics. This raises theoretical questions that women's studies scholars have been asking for some time. Must a woman scholar take a feminist position? Will her reading be necessarily construed as feminist? I will provide a full discussion of this theoretical concern of her relationship to feminist and Muslim feminist discourses in the following chapter.

[21]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 70.

[22]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 217.

Mattson, human justice is not always the goal of the Divine text.

Nonetheless, Mattson continues to address stereotypes of women as oppressed in Islam through historical counter-examples that also double as anecdotes in the history of the Qur'an. Twice Mattson discusses Khadijah's role as a strong supporter of Muhammad's prophecy, his closest confidant, and the first convert to his religion. She comments on his wife 'A'isha's virtue of being defended against slander by God's words in the Qur'an. Through the story of the Prophet's wives in Medina, she provides the reasoning for the original intent of hijab according to the *asbab an-nuzul* or basis or occasion of revelation of key verses such as 24:30-31, without going into the discussion of contemporary interpretations of the verses or a full discussion on hijab.[23] All of these points lack grounding in a broader context of gender discussions. However, Mattson's presentation of the Qur'an to "general educated readers," which is the aim of her manuscript, is replete with examples and evidence that can be used as a starting point in debates on gender. Without a full discussion of gender in the Qur'an, or in Islam, it is clear that when possible Mattson takes it upon herself to engage in discourses which subvert stereotypes of Muslim women as disrespected, secondary, or oppressed.

Mattson's approach to Islamic law is also one that creates openings for gender debates: "our very narrow vision, our legalistic vision, and our authoritarian models of decision making [...] are excluding those people who can offer us a different vision of the future."[24] In her view, the scholars who have full training of the Islamic sciences should exercise their creativity when doing *ijtihad* (juridical reasoning) to take in to consideration particulars of modern day and American life. Like other modernist scholars such as Fazlur Rahman, Mattson points to the example of slavery as a thriving practice during the time of the Prophet, which the Qur'an did not prohibit but regulated.[25] Centuries

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[23]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 70.

[24]Mattson, quoted in United States Institute USIP "*Ijtihad*: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles for the Twenty-First Century," *Special Report* 125 (August 2004): 7.

[25]For a discussion on modernist approaches to Islam see Omid Safi, "Modernism: Islamic Modernism" In *Encyclopedia of Religion* edited by Lindsay Jones. 2nd edition. 6095-6102. Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005.

later scholars came to the consensus of abolishing the practice, not only because that was in line with universal human rights, but also because they felt the Qur'an and the Prophet's Sunnah gestured towards abolition.[26] Feminist scholars have made similar arguments regarding the inequities that exist in Islamic law regarding women's witnessing, inheritance, and access to divorce; the Qur'an and the Prophet's sunnah both gestured towards gender egalitarianism not only in terms of spirituality but also in society. Ultimately Mattson's vision of the Qur'anic text and Islam is a historicized one which recognizes contextual patriarchy, but she reads the text using a modern, American lens such that her Islam is one in which there is a need to maintain tradition even in some matters of gender relations, while living a modern life. She draws a line between interpreting the Qur'an in light of modernity, which may include rereading some aspects of gender relations, and reading the Qur'an specifically for the purpose of gender justice.

2.1 Women's Spiritual and Religious Authority and the *Imamah* Debate

In this section I will point out the divergences between Mattson's and Wadud's positions on the potentiality for women's religious leadership. As both scholars advocate in favor of women occupying positions of religious authority, an idea that breaks from traditional conceptions of authority in Muslim communities, they each define authority and women's responsibilities in religious leadership differently.

In the United States most imams are foreign trained, many are foreign born, and those who are from the U.S. rarely have the formal training to deal with issues in their communities. Imams in the U.S. are not mere prayer leaders; rather they provide their communities with a sense of belonging, interpretation of the religious tradition in light of life America, and marriage and youth counseling; most offer classes, perform

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[26]Mattson, quoted in "*Ijtihad*: Reinterpreting Islamic Principles" 7.

marriages, declare divorces, and even provide *fatwas* (regardless if they are trained in Islamic law). Much of the functions of the imam are gender non-specific and can be carried out by an *'alimah*, or by chaplains as Mattson advocates, as a way of increasing women's participation. However, in many Muslim communities, Tayyibah Taylor notes from a journalistic perspective, "even today, if no man is present each woman prays individually – demonstrating that only men can lead."[27] In other words religious authority itself is often times thought to reside with men and not with women.

Nowhere else is the difference in opinions over access to *imamat* in the United States better represented than in an article by Louay Safi in *Islamic Horizons*, ISNA's bimonthly publication, following Wadud's 2005 Friday prayers.[28] From this article it is clear that the debate is more nuanced than a dichotomy of positions for and against women's leadership. Rather, with the supporters of both ISNA and the now defunct Progressive Muslim Union (PMU) wanting increased participation of women, the language of the debate has shifted toward how we can most effectively and Islamically go about making room for women. Because ISNA's support for women's leadership is based on representation of women's ideas in communities and improving their space in the mosque, it is not a stance that tolerates women's leadership of *salat* as an indication of accepting women's full spiritual and moral agency.

Louay Safi writes that the PMU which organized the mixed-congregation Friday prayers along with Dr. Amina Wadud are pursuing the extreme opposite to women's seclusion in the mosque, which is a position that, "will only hurt the reform agenda already underway throughout North America."[29] That reform agenda, largely introduced by Mattson for ISNA, is a balanced approach that seeks to reduce gender segregation and increase women's participation in mosque politics but also circumvents the question

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[27]Taylor, 31.

[28]Louay Safi is a controversial figure, who has trained Muslim chaplains for military and prison systems, but has recently been named an un-indicted co-conspirator in a federal investigation in 2005 and has been dismissed from training personnel for the military.

[29]Louay Safi, "Women and the Masjid: How to Maintain a Balanced Approach Concerning Evolving Practices of the Muslim American Community" Islamic Horizons (May-June 2005): 21.

of women's religious authority as its own category, not in relation to men's undisputed authority. Safi believes that ISNA is following a strategy of reform while those who organized Wadud's Friday prayers are populist: "reform aimed at critically engaging Muslim traditions must stick closely to the Qur'an and prophetic practices to clarify Islamic injunctions and established Prophetic traditions. Populism, such as is being promoted by PMU, may obtain headlines but not community understanding."[30] For Wadud, leading the Friday prayers was indeed an expression of the Qur'an's vision of egalitarianism and in keeping with the Prophet's Sunnah (the *hadith* of Umm Waraqa). Women's *imamat*, then, becomes an issue of interpretation with Wadud's reading being far from populist.

Safi's point here, that reforms must "engage the larger community in dialogue to create a new awareness and to translate the articulated principles into a living tradition," is an important one.[31] Similar sentiments of including the community at large are even felt by supporters of woman-led prayer such as the Los Angeles-based Muslim Women's League (MWL) that is dedicated to a reformist dialogue on gender issues in Islamic law and Muslim communities. MWL issued a statement before the March 18th prayers that, while they support the initiative that would create possibilities for women leading mixed gender prayers, they are "not convinced that this Friday's much-publicized event is the best way to advance the cause of Muslim women who are in distress here or around the world [...]."[32] This was less of a criticism of Wadud, whom the MWL views as a role model and important scholar, and more disapproval for the event's organizers, who seemed to be pursuing the cause suddenly, sensationally, and "without a clear follow-up plan that outlines what must be done for change to occur."[33] MWL predicted: "the women this event is intended to uplift will become even more

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[30]Safi, "Women and the Masjid," 21.

[31]Safi, "Women and the Masjid," 21.

[32]Muslim Women's MWL. "Woman-led Friday Prayer" http://www.mwlusa.org/topics/rights/womanledprayer.htm (accessed June 12, 2009).

[33]Muslim Women's League. "Woman-led Friday Prayer"

cut off from public access and leadership roles than before."[34] Along with ISNA's position, even the supportive MWL is suspicious: "for many, this event may ultimately hinder the work currently in progress on improving accessibility and opportunities for leadership for Muslim women in the U.S."[35]

Regardless of the MWL and ISNA positions, the fact that the question of women's mixed gender *salat* leadership is a topic that has caused even the most conservative members of the community, as well as ISNA on an institutional level, to begin the discussions on gender issues that were previously ignored, perhaps strengthening their already existing efforts at women's inclusion. Prior to this, institutional concern for gender debates arose from responses to Western criticism of women's status in Islam and attempts to reconcile Islamic ideals of femininity with the demands of Western life, and to a lesser extent, responses to Muslim women's objections.[36] In other words, the issue of women leading prayer has caused conservatives to lay out the parameters of how far they believe women's rights can be claimed legitimately. Furthermore, those parameters appear to be much more permissive than what they may have outlined before, given the increased gender consciousness in American Muslim communities or engagements with feminism that I will discuss in the next chapter.

2.1.1 Ingrid Mattson's Vision of Women's Religious Leadership and position on Women's Imamat

In this section, I will discuss Mattson's vision of religious authority, her views on openings and limits for women's leadership, and finally her position on women's *imamat*. In the final chapter of her largely descriptive book on the historical context of the Qur'an, Mattson takes on a prescriptive voice in outlining certain parameters for extracting meaning from the Qur'an and forming consensus on modern challenges which

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[34]Muslim Women's League. "Woman-led Friday Prayer"

[35]Muslim Women's League. "Woman-led Friday Prayer"

[36]Ziba Mir-Hosseini, "The Construction of Gender in Islamic Legal Thought and Strategies for Reform", *Hawwa* 1, no. 1, (2003): 16.

contradict the historical Qur'anic context. For her, these parameters form the basis of legitimate religious authority and approaches to the Qur'an.

Firstly, interpreters of the Qur'an and Islamic jurists must have a deep understanding of the scholarly tradition and classical sciences. Mattson feels that many activists lack this but also that many traditionalists do not recognize the limitations of the scholarly tradition. She feels that both of these groups have interpretive lenses which are too narrow. In her estimation: "our search for the true meaning of the Qur'an and its application to our lives cannot be a narrow, partisan following of a particular school of thought, for it is certainly possible that groups, like individuals, can engage in self-interested exegesis."[37] She favors systemic exegesis justifiable to the most number of Muslims. Second is the character and conduct of the scholar. "Not just knowledge but exemplary behavior that, in the minds of the faithful, gives any individual the authority to speak on behalf of the Divine [...and] proper intention – to sincerely wish to be guided by God [...]." are key requirements of a scholar to attain authority in the eyes of fellow Muslims.[38] Thirdly, it is also necessary for one to live in a community of Muslims because "we all have emotional scars, spiritual disabilities, and stubborn desires that make us less than perfect mirrors for God's divine light [...; others] can help illuminate our flaws and support us in our spiritual growth."[39] Finally, a major requirement of authority for Qur'anic interpretation is "not only to study the history of the dominant leaders and institutions in Muslim societies, but also to search for the voices of marginalized individuals and groups to see how they articulated and maintained their faith when they had little power."[40] For Mattson, a true leader of the Muslim community is one who takes into account minority and divergent opinions in order to create unity (not uniformity) amongst Muslims.

Mattson maintains that religious authority need not reside exclusively with schol-

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[37]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 231.

[38]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 220, 231.

[39]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 231.

[40]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 226.

arly and religious elites. Individuals have the right to interpret the Qur'an based on their sense of justice. Quoting the 13th century Sufi poet, Rumi, she says that one can be sure about interpretations of the Qur'an so long as they are inspiring, awesome, and motivating to believers. The story she tells about a woman named Zaynab, who stood up to Abu Ja'far al-Baqir, the 5th Shi'a imam (he had no political or religious power in Medina but was considered by proto-Sunnis to be a religious authority by virtue of being a descendent of the Prophet) after he made a seemingly misogynistic comment comparing a group of women obstructing his way at a funeral to the women companions of Joseph who put him in compromising positions. Zaynab responded by saying that men had tricked and incarcerated Joseph but women had loved and comforted him. Mattson's intention to tell this story is to highlight that even when Muslims do not have authoritative knowledge or are not considered part of the religious elite, they should follow their God-given inner moral sense, or *fitra*, in their approach to interpret verses from the Qur'an.[41] This example also doubles as an example of women's objections to popular religious authority.

However, even though Mattson uses an example of a woman responding to religious authority, her monograph does not single out women's perspectives as marginalized voices that need to be studied and encouraged. Rather Mattson is concerned with the gender non-specific individual: "due heed must be paid to the small voices (or inner voices) that sometimes challenge the interpretations offered by those who are considered to be speaking authoritatively."[42] Her approach to women's leadership in Muslim communities is based on the principle of inclusivity: "every member of the community must take part in creating and sustaining authority; otherwise it is oppression."[43] For

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[41]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 228 and Ingrid Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam?: Debating Form and Function in Muslim Womens Leadership," *McDonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations Hartford Seminary*, http://macdonald.hartsem.edu/muslimwomensleadership.pdf (accessed June 1, 2009), 4.

[42]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 226.

[43]Ingrid Mattson quoted in Juris Pupcenoks, "Ingrid Mattson and the American Muslim Exceptionalism," *Muslim Public Affairs Journal* (July 2006): 120.

her women only become "full members of their community" when they participate on all levels of discussion and have the potential for leadership.[44] In order for Muslim communities to sustain, women need to be full participants in their communities, they must be recognized as full spiritual authorities, become board members of their mosques, and serve roles as chaplains and MSA presidents.[45] It is for the principle of inclusivity in "bring[ing] people closer to God" and so that they "will not be prevented–by being blocked from sacred texts or houses of worship and study–from accessing the liberating message of obedience to God alone" that she feels Muslim women's leadership is an important goal.[46] She also recognizes that "many Muslim women [...] feel that religious authority has too often been used to suppress them."[47] Mattson's advocacy for better spaces for women in the mosque is based on this same idea of providing opportunities for full participation of all Muslims in their communities.

Mattson complains, "feminists make a big deal when a female rises to power." It is perhaps for this reason that in her book when she tells the story of a young woman, Reem Osman, who strives for perfection in memorizing and reciting the Qur'an, she does not mention her gender as part of the great significance of her achievement when she finally obtains the *ijaza* or accreditation from a well renowned male scholar of the Shatibi tradition. The teachers who prepare her for reciting in front of the sheikh are also women who have obtained the *ijaza* before her and are authorized to teach the next generation in a traditional lineage of recitation that reaches back to the Prophet. The fact that they become women with a kind of religious authority (to teach recitation of the Qur'an) and are accredited by a male authority is not part of her discussion. For Mattson it is important that women have this knowledge and authority, parallel to

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[44]Ingrid Mattson, "'I Accept your Trust:' In Electing a Woman As Head, ISNA Members Make a Powerful Statement," *Islamic Horizons* 35, no. 6 (November-December 2006): 10.

[45]The national organization of MSAs or MSA national, the precursor to many national Islamic organizations, elected its first woman and first American-born president, Hadia Mubarak in 2004 and since has had a predominantly female leadership in its executive and advisory boards.

[46]Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam," 3-4.

[47]Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam," 3.

men, but not in opposition to them.

It is a theme in Mattson's remarks on Muslim women's leadership that there are a number of women who lead Muslim communities but wish to remain unrecognized: "there are deeply knowledgeable female scholars and revered spiritual leaders in all Muslim societies. Most are not widely known, but many have significant influence over large numbers of women and even men."[48] She points out that with the exception of Indonesian women reciters, Muslim women reciters of the Qur'an do not publicize their recitations out of modesty. She clarifies: "We might consider this a consequence of social norms that unfairly exclude women from public life in man Muslim societies. However, many of these women consider themselves the guardians of authentic Islamic piety that discourages anyone man or woman from seeking attention and praise for performing what should be, after all, an act of worship."[49] She does not explore further what is the gendered nature of men gaining recognition and fame for excellence in Qur'an recitation.

Mattson acknowledges that modesty for public recitation of the Qur'an stems from "the conviction that it takes little for men to be attracted to women; even the Qur'an, if recited by a woman with a beautiful voice, might be enough to cause improper infatuation in some men."[50] However Mattson does not mention here that this conviction comes from the legal position that a woman's voice is part of her *'awra* or nakedness and thus men hearing women's recitations is prohibited, which is a highly contested position, but could instead of modesty be the underlying reason that many women do not publicize their recitations.[51] In her estimation, there is only a legal prohibition against women's *imamat*; women do not take on the remaining roles of religious authority out of modesty and being culturally socialized against it: "I don't see any

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[48]Mattson, "'I Accept your Trust,'" 10.

[49]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 130.

[50]Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*, 130.

[51]For a discussion on Wahhabi and conservative legal position on women's voice as *'awra*, see Abou El Fadl's *Speaking in God's Name* pp. 185-188.

position that a Muslim woman couldn't qualify for in the Muslim community–except imam–and there are no theoretical barriers to women in leadership, but there are lots of [cultural] reasons why women don't participate in higher numbers in public life."[52] It may not be a "big deal when a female rises to power," but because it is not generally a public acknowledgement, of women's achievements it remains a "big deal" to many.

Instead of advocating for imamahs, for Mattson the first step in remedying the lack of women's leadership is to examine their situation in the mosque. In keeping with her idea of preserving the Sunnah in matters of *ibadat* or worship, Mattson assesses that several American mosques do not follow the Sunnah, because women are not able to engage with their mosque's activities and the main khutbah because of being sequestered in another room (regardless of dingy basement or glorious balcony). She has been criticized for famously saying, "most Muslim women are content with a separate prayer space in the mosque."[53] However, Mattson takes the task of reforming mosques seriously. In her view women should have the option of occupying space in the main prayer halls so to participate and engage fully in the Friday sermons and other programs but should also have the option to remain in seclusion. This option is for those who are held back by "cultural reasons." This option to join the main prayer hall is the creation of a new paradigm of women's participation in mosques which is possible in America, away from the dominant models of gender placement or even a lack of women's spaces in Mosques in many Muslim countries. Mattson says that by being "in America, Muslim women have found the support and freedom to reclaim their proper place in the life of their religious community."[54] However it may not exclusive to the American context and is not homogeneously a desirable solution for Muslim women in America.

Simultaneously for some Muslims, women assuming any posts of leadership, not just *imamat*, to ensure their full participation and representation breaks from the Islamic

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[52]Mattson quoted in Taylor, 28.

[53]Mattson quoted in Pupcenoks, 120.

[54]Mattson, "'Special Obligation,'" 1.

tradition of male leadership. She uses the language of civic participation inclusion, and representation which is the same language used in the civil rights movement with respect to racial segregation and racism in America. For this reason, many see Mattson as a reformer. Centering her reforms around the mosque experience, and suggesting a program that reforms mosques one at a time to increase women's participation, also indicates how she considers Muslim communities following the congregational model of religious communities in the United States: Mark Chaves suggests this is the site for cultural negotiations on the institutional level. Additionally, she is interested in reform of the overall Muslim experience for all congregants, and is not committed to a program of bringing gender egalitarian models to communities.

Mattson says, matters relating to *'ibadat* must be separated from *mu'amalat* (human relations), and the former should not be altered from the Sunnah of the Prophet because it relates to worship of God, the method of which comes only from the Prophet's traditions. The Sunnah of the Prophet's prayer must not be altered; thus a woman leading mixed congregational prayers is not permissible. However women can lead other women in prayer according to the Prophet's prescription. Mattson holds that this kind of strictness against innovation in *'ibadat* is responsible for the remarkable unity Muslims have in *salat*, fasting, and pilgrimage.[55] The laws of *mu'amalat* pertain to human relations and can, and in many cases should, change to reflect gender equity. In preserving the Prophet's sunnah regarding leading prayer, Mattson holds that the roles that a typical American imam plays such as scholar, counselor, and representative of the community to the public can be split to include women in those capacities. For Mattson, this formulates a kind of spiritual and religious authority to interpret, represent, and most importantly, to participate fully.

Mattson says that in part, the question of validity of women's *imamat* is misplaced because it assumes that all power to lead the community lies with the imam.[56] It is important to note that a non-American (and non-Shi'a) sense of the role of imam in-

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[55]Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam," 10.

[56]Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam," 9.

volves only leading congregational prayers. Unless the imam is also known as an 'alim or shaykh, he does not typically provide spiritual guidance, nor is he responsible for providing a sense of cohesion and community to the worshipers and resolve internal disputes or even make policies for the community. In some Muslim countries women have served in capacities of counselor, 'alimah, or even muftiyya formally accepted and trained by the state or informally adopted by communities. However, in the United States these functions are just some of the key roles of an imam and form his main basis of power, since leadership of prayer has been carried out by lay Muslims when imams with proper training were scarce in the United States. Because many imams in the United States are either trained in foreign countries or hold the positions of imams simply because they are religious men (without training), they are not able to successfully fulfill the clerical demands that appropriately trained women can.

Mattson's formulation of women's leadership in positions other than imam, as well as general participation of community members regardless of gender, removes added pressures off imams and in a sense restores the role of the Sunni imam to a prayer leader, and not much more. She feels that power should be diversified: "it may be more helpful to begin with a functional approach to identifying religious leadership in the Muslim community than to assume that certain positions [i.e. imam] are the norm and then try to squeeze women into those positions."[57] The needs of a community must be at the center for searching for figures of authority who can best fulfill those needs. Mattson's position is that women need not be exempt from this because they can take on the role of a Muslimah (Muslim woman) Chaplain. Through the role of chaplain, Muslim women can fulfill some of the jobs which have fallen under the role of the imam in the United States. Mattson's understanding of imamat is that specific training and knowledge is required. The inconsistancy here is that even if women acquire the same training and knowledge, they still cannot be imams. In other words, by focusing on diversification of roles of leadership in American imamat, Mattson implicitly answers the title of her essay "Can a Woman be an Imam" by saying no – imamat is reserved

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[57]Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam," 9.

for men.

2.1.2 Wadud's Vision of Women in Roles of Spiritual and Ritual Authority

While Mattson acknowledges the need for Muslim women's leadership as an expression of their religious authority and full participation in their communities, for her this does not include leadership of mixed-gender *salat*. For Wadud the issue at stake in advocating for a woman to serve as an *imamah* is full recognition of a woman's humanity and her spiritual and moral agency. Laury Silvers, an academic activist says, "women imams are not visible. The presence of female religious leaders will habituate members of the community to accept the worth of women in all arenas of Muslim life."[58] This is recognizing greater potential for success in integrating women in leadership and greater gender egalitarian possibilities in Muslim communities through a top-down rather than bottom-up approach in which first women appear in roles of authority subsequently in order to bring reforms to their communities. For proponents of women serving as imamahs, denying women's religious and spiritual authority for *imamat* demonstrates the inequities in this and all other aspects of the law and community interpretation of Islam.

According to Wadud, the question of women leading prayer and delivering a khutbah is an issue she first stumbled upon by chance in 1994 during a visit to South Africa when she was asked without prior notice by a mosque community to deliver the Friday sermon. Although she recognizes how she was instrumentally used by this group for this event and subsequently by PMU for leading the 2005 Friday prayers, Wadud feels strongly about the theoretical possibilities for women leading men in prayer. The South Africa event led her to contemplate about the issue for the first time, which prompted

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[58]Laury Silvers, "Islamic Jurisprudence, 'Civil' Disobedience, and Woman-Led Prayer" in *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, ed. Edward Curtis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 248.

her to construct a two-fold argument. Firstly, she questions why do men have exclusive access? For Wadud, the idea that male authority is part of the natural order, "[is] not a function of Islam, but rather [to] glorify the male gender."[59] We are accustomed to male authority. Secondly, she creates an ethical and feminist reading of the Qur'an in favor of women's leadership.

Indicative of her lack of having an interpretive community, unlike Mattson, Wadud does not have a practical outline for gender inclusion in religious authority in Muslim communities or a systematic discussion of the legal permissibility of *imamat*. Rather, like her reading of verse 4:34, Wadud posits an ethical justification for women leading mixed gendered congregational prayers, including Friday prayers, which she then applies to her call for legal reform regarding this and other gender issues.

For Wadud, the term islam, as well as the faith of Islam is "engaged surrender" to the complexities of God's will. The term engaged surrender "shows greater agency exercised through personal conscientious participation."[60] Therefore belief in the tradition of Islam itself, that is, being a Muslim, means that one must be a conscientious participant in belief in the one God. Every Muslim believes in the oneness of God, or *tawhid* as the uniformity of "existing multiplicities or seeming dualities in both the corporeal and metaphysical realm."[61] She translates *tawhid* as an ethical term in a tawhidic paradigm which "relates to relationships and developments within the social and political realm, emphasizing the unity of all human creators beneath one Creator."[62] In other words, *tawhid* is oneness of the creator as well as unity (and therefore equality) of humans under the creator. Using Buber's I-Thou model of ontology, Wadud argues that in order to avoid violation of tawhid, I and Thou must be on an equal plane beneath Allah–that is in order for all human beings to believe in tawhid, no one person can have a rank

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[59]Wadud quoted in Taylor, 29.

[60]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 23.

[61]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 28.

[62]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 28.

above the other.[63] A hierarchy among human beings would cause those on the lowest rung to treat those above them as their lords. Therefore, for *tawhid* to be true, human beings must be equal to each other.

For Wadud, human equality is intimately connected with belief and awareness of the unity of God. Every human being is a *khalifa*: "Being Khalifa is equivalent to fulfilling one's human destiny as a moral agent [...] In respect to society, [this] means working for justice."[64] By extension she defines *taqwa*, not as God-consciousness as is commonly done in American Muslim discourse, but as "moral consciousness in the trustee of Allah. It is the motivating instinct to perform all actions as though they are transparent."[65] The tawhidic paradigm is implemented as "the inspiration for removing gender stratification from all levels of social interaction: public and private, ritual and political."[66] Further "[n]ot only does it mean that I and Thou are equal, but also it means that I and Thou are one within the ones of Allah. Social, liturgical, and political functions become determined by the capacity of both women and men in a larger realm of education, dedication, and contribution with no arbitrary exclusion of women from performing any of these functions."[67] For Wadud social relations are based on equality, therefore social functions such as leadership of prayer, which ought to be open to men and women of equal and appropriate qualifications, is an extension of belief in *tawhid*.

2.1.3   Hadiths on Women's Imamat and leadership

Modernist approaches to Qur'anic exegesis, including Wadud's treatment of gender in the Qur'an, refer only to the Qur'an itself to the exclusion of using Sunnah and *hadith*

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[63]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 30-31.

[64]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 34.

[65]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 40.

[66]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 32.

[67]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 32.

for illuminating the meaning of the text. Yet there are two *hadiths* relevant to our discussion of women's lay or managerial leadership and women's authority to lead men in prayer. The first frequently quoted *hadith* is, "The people who entrust their affairs to a woman will not succeed (*lan yufliha qawm wallu amrahum imra'a*)."[68] Another variation of the translation of this hadith, which is found in Sahih Bukhari is, "A nation led by a woman will not prosper."[69] It is often used to dismiss the possibility of women assuming leadership positions as un-Islamic or used to explain any shortcomings, failures, or disasters under a woman's leadership as an inevitable outcome according to Islam.

In her book, *The Veil and the Male Elite* Fatima Mernissi investigates the strength of reliability of this hadith's transmitters. She calls into question the reliability of Abu Bakra, who she argues fabricated the *hadith* in order to preserve his political position with 'Ali ibn Abi Talib after 'A'isha's defeat in the Battle of the Camel. Upon 'A'isha's loss, he alleged that the Prophet said women could not lead anyway. As Jonathan Brown summarizes, Mernissi argues against the authenticity of this hadith: "Malik [Ibn Anas] is reported to have said that he would not accept *hadiths* from someone known to have lied about any matter, and Abu Bakra was once flogged for untruthfully accusing someone of committing adultery!"[70] Therefore one needs to be vigilant regarding the authenticity of *hadiths* that belong to even the most respected, and sahih collections. Although Mernissi casts aspersions on Abu Bakra based on other *hadiths* and texts on transmitter criticism, she relies on sources that are similar to the ones which authenticate Abu Bakra; she inconsistently accepts and rejects material from the *hadith* corpus without systematically researching all of the reports she relies on for delegitimizing Abu Bakra.

An alternative account of how this *hadith* came about exists: the prophet did say

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[68]Quoted in Jonathan Brown, *Hadith: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2009), 163.

[69]Taylor, 31.

[70]Brown, 249. For a more complete analysis of the versions of this *hadith* and *hadith* criticism texts see Abou El Fadl's *Speaking in God's Name* p. 111-115 and Mernissi's *Veil and the Male Elite* p. 49-61.

those words but in a specific context which Abu Bakra ignored in quoting it. Brown says that Ghazzali clarifies that "the Persian Sassanid Empire was experiencing internal political crisis as well as military defeats at the hands of the Byzantines. In the midst of this trouble, the Sassanids brought a woman to the throne. The Prophet was merely noting that being ruled by a woman would not prevent the empire's downfall."[71]

Amina Wadud's position on this *hadith* is that "there is a tremendous amount of research indicating this [hadith] is very weak. She says even when evidence is before us, we don't use our minds to consider how women can be effective leaders politically, economically, religiously and spiritually, we just acquiesce to custom."[72] Although there is doubt whether the *hadith* is *sahih*, it remains largely accepted in Muslim communities on the authority of Bukhari. Like Mernissi, Khaled Abou El Fadl questions why the *hadith* was accepted by Bukhari in the first place, given Abu Bakra's sentence, and given that subsequent Muslim interpretative communities "did not do a thorough job in analyzing [this] tradition."[73] He argues that the *hadith* "has very limited competence and that the work of the interpretive communities has limited precedent-value to our contemporary interpretive communities."[74] In other words, although previous communities accepted the hadith, we need not hold it authentic or relevant today.

Azizah Magazine reports that "Mattson maintains that the *hadith* is sahih, and notes that perhaps it is less a disqualification of women in the position of leadership and perhaps more a comment on men being unable to accept a female ruler."[75] This analysis responds to the way the *hadith* is used to disqualify women from assuming leadership roles; however her explanation does not question whether or in what context the Prophet may have said those words. Mattson does refer to Mernissi's scholarship in recounting historical instances of Muslim women leaders in *Forgotten Queens of Is-*

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[71]Brown, 163.

[72]Wadud quoted in Taylor, 31.

[73]Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 114.

[74]Abou El Fadl, *Speaking in God's Name*, 114.

[75]Mattson quoted in Taylor, 31.

lam. However, she does not cite her scholarship regarding the weakness of the hadith, perhaps because it is authenticated in Sahih al-Bukhari, one of the most respected Sunni *hadith* collections. Regardless, the *hadith* did surface upon her election to the ISNA presidency, in response to which Louay Safi writes in *Islamic Horizons*, "in no way does [the hadith] invalidate the principle of moral and political gender equality."[76] Clearly her election "ha[s] been questioned by some Muslims in North America and many Muslims overseas" in relation to this hadith, which if it continued to be viewed as authentic, also continues to challenge her leadership.[77]

The second *hadith* originates from a story involving a woman who approached the Prophet to ask who can lead her *dar* (household, area, or neighborhood) in prayer. The Prophet "commanded Umm Waraqa, a woman who had collected the Qur'an, to lead the people of her area in prayer. She had her own mu'adhdhin."[78] Following the April 18th 2005 prayer event, Imam Zaid Shakir, Laury Silvers, and Azizah al-Hibri all discussed this *hadith* in connection with validity of women's *imamat*.

Shakir describes both the event and its leader as a *fitna* or calamity for many Muslims. In speaking for "the Islamic orthodoxy, which remains to this day, the only religious orthodoxy, which has not been marginalized to the fringes of the faith community represents," his response was to clarify the classical interpretations of the Umm Waraqa *hadith* and the subsequent legal rulings of the four main Sunni schools of jurisprudence.[79] He outlines three possible interpretations of the Umm Waraqa hadith, which he holds *da'if* or weak because of the unreliability or lack of complete information on two of its transmitters in the isnad. First, Umm Waraqa led mixed gender prayers only in the privacy of her home, narrowly interpreting the term *dar*. It is for this reason that classical scholars "Imams al-Muzani, at-Tabari, Abu Thawr, and

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[76]Louay Safi, "Gender Politics," *Islamic Horizons* 35, no. 6 (November-December, 2006): 12.

[77]Safi, "Gender Politics," 12.

[78]Hadith Umm Waraqa, quoted in Zaid Shakir "An Examination of the Issue of Female Prayer Leadership" in *The Columbia Sourcebook of Muslims in the United States*, ed. Edward Curtis (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 240.

[79]Shakir, 240.

Dawud Ad-Dhahiri allowed for females to lead men in prayer."[80] However, the permission is limited to the household; therefore Shakir concludes that according to the widest interpretation of the hadith, the public April 18th event was outside the scope of this hadith. In the second possible interpretation, Shakir concedes that *dar* need not mean household and instead could pertain to the neighborhood around Umm Waraqa's house. However as he widens the meaning of *dar* here, he restricts the possibilities of those who Umm Waraqa led in prayer to only women in accordance with one of the versions of the hadith.[81] Shakir's third potential interpretation is that Umm Waraqa only led the women of her household in a private prayer.

Shakir explains that, based on these interpretations, Shafi'i, Hanbali, and Hanafi schools of jurisprudence permit women to lead other women in prayer from the front row (instead of as an imam in front, as Wadud led Friday prayers). The first two schools permit public prayer leadership of women, while Hanafis dislike the practice altogether. One minority Hanbali opinion permits women to lead men and women in tarawih prayers from the rows of women if there is no qualified man present. Shakir mentions that "some modern scholars" permit women to lead men in prayer in their private homes.[82] He concludes in summary that "a woman leading a mixed gender, public congregational prayer is not something sanctioned by Islamic law in the Sunni tradition" even if women do lead men privately.[83]

While Shakir speaks on behalf of classical Sunni jurisprudence, proponents of women-led mixed gender *salat* contest the very assumptions behind these rulings. Laury Silvers explains, "there is a tendency [...] to honor the legal tradition by refusing to question it even in the face of social wrongs that [Shakir himself] admit[s]."[84] She calls on scholars of Islamic jurisprudence to exert *ijtihad* in finding a solution that enables women to

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[80]Shakir, 242.

[81]Shakir, 243.

[82]Shakir, 244.

[83]Shakir, 244.

[84]Silvers, 249.

become imams. While she recognizes that "the doubt that is raised by the lack of both a clear permission and a clear prohibition does not allow us to argue that the prayer can be permitted," she feels that "since there is no clear prohibition in the Sources, women-led mixed-gender prayer is permissible if a particular Muslim community agrees to it."[85] Similar to Mattson, Silvers recognizes the separation in matters of *ibadat* and *mu'amalat* and likewise argues for creativity in *ijtihad*, also citing the example of slavery as Mattson does. Although Mattson limits the creativity to matters of *mu'amalat*, Silvers argues that "we should think beyond these [legal] divisions, as important as they are, to remember that scholars were willing to finesse a 'prohibition' [regarding slavery] from a clear legal permission derived from the Qur'an itself in order to bring practice in line with their consciences."[86]

It is significant that neither Ingrid Mattson nor Amina Wadud has discussed the *hadith* of Umm Waraqa with regard to their positions on women's religious leadership. Perhaps it creates a confounding variable for Mattson's position on prayer leadership, or she, like Shakir, believes it is a weak hadith, not worthy of emphasis so as not accentuate a discussion on the *hadith* that compromises her well-liked position on improving women's accommodations in their mosques and promoting women's leadership in Muslim communities.

For Wadud it is even more curious not to refer to this *hadith* substantively, even though she is staying consistent with her Qur'an-only approach, as al-Hibri and others have made a case for the validity of women leading mixed gender *salat* based on this hadith, or at least using the support of this hadith. Wadud mentions it once in her monograph, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, through a passing secondary source reference to Leila Ahmed's work, as an exception to the historical precedent of men only leading mixed gender *salat*. Wadud does not provide any further discussion on the *hadith* and does not make much of the notable exception to the precedent set by the Prophet.

It is not that Mattson is more conservative than Wadud, that explains her position

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[85]Silvers, 248-249.

[86]Silvers, 249.

on woman-led prayers. The categories of conservative and progressive are not simple indicators of position on this issue. For example, Islamic Law professor and activist, Azizah al-Hibri, who is considered by some as a feminist and simultaneously by some as an apologist, for pointing to exceptional women in Muslim history or pro-women jurisprudential injunctions out of context, favors woman-led prayer.[87] Regardless of the categories in which we place reformers, al-Hibri, along with other scholars who advocate for reform through orthoprax practices, rather than wholesale reform of Islamic legal systems, interprets the Umm Waraqa *hadith* as permissive of women's *imamat* in the following way:

> Both Abu Thawr and al-Tabari believe that [a woman can lead men in prayer]. They based their view on the fact that the Prophet appointed Umm Waraqa the imam of her household, yet there was a male mu'aththin in the household. It stands to reason that she must have been his imam, demonstrating that women can lead men in prayer. Ibn Rushd and Ibn Qudamah agree, but require that the woman imam lead the prayers from behind the lines of praying men, and stand in the midst of the women.[88]

Citing similar scholarship, support for women leading prayers came from seemingly unlikely, sources such as the grand mufti of Egypt, Sheikh Ali Guma', who is largely considered as a moderate scholar, not liberal.[89]

Even if the *hadith* is regarded as an authentic instance in Muslim history in which a woman was appointed by the prophet to lead her mixed-gender community in prayer, whether she led Friday prayers or delivered sermons is unknown, which makes those functions unprecedented for women. Ultimately the debate over the Umm Waraqa *ha-*

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[87]Kecia Ali, "Progressive Muslims and Islamic Jurisprudence" in *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* ed. Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld 2003), 164-166. Kecia Ali has described al-Hibri's approach to reforms in marriage and divorce laws as, "missing the forest for the trees" as she advocates for women to include stipulations granting them equal right to divorce (even though women are often culturally discouraged from including stipulations) without questioning the nature of the nikah contract that establishes the husband's ownership (*milk*) of the wife, whom he can repudiate unilaterally using talaq.

[88]Azizah al-Hibri quoted in Taylor, 29.

[89]Sheikh Ali Guma' has since distanced himself from the *fatwa* he passed on the permissibility of women led mixed congregational prayers out of fear of retaliation but never publicly retracted his position on the matter.

dith is distressing to both Wadud's and Mattson's positions, because it is a moment in history demonstrating women's religious authority that is contextualized as exceptional, out of the ordinary, and perhaps even fictitious. Pointing to it, as al-Hibri and others have done, may not necessarily strengthen the argument for women's religious leadership; however, as Mernissi has demonstrated, it is often enough to cite a sexist, albeit perhaps fabricated, *hadith* in Muslim communities to convince others on the issue of women's leadership.

Chapter 3

The Role of Location: Women's Leadership, Race, Feminism, and the American Landscape

In this chapter I will discuss the American Muslim context that enables or disables women from acquiring administrative religious office or leading rituals. The major issues that come into effect when discussing two of the main key figures in American Muslim women's religious leadership and increased community participation, Mattson and Wadud, are the intersectional issues of race and their engagements with feminism. First I will discuss the American Muslim context in which there is some measure of success in integrating women in religious leadership posts, namely Mattson's presidency and her projects of mosque reforms and Muslim women's chaplaincy as an expression of the American religious landscape. Second I will discuss the tension in the work of both Mattson and Wadud between stated and unstated inspiration for reform, namely ethics and feminism. Does the inspiration of their work come from the overall feminist attitudes found amongst women scholars of religion and in modern North America at large? What is the role of the Islamic sources in this case? Not knowing where the reform impulses come from, internal or external concepts of ethics in Islam or modernist discourse alienates those afraid of Americanization and prevents us from having more

honest conversation about the concept of Islamic reform. Third I will discuss the racial contexts of Mattson's and Wadud's contributions. The deprivileging of Wadud's voice on the basis of her race by some American Muslims prompts discussion on two issues: women are secondary on the level of their representation in their community leadership, but more importantly, there is a racial hierarchy amongst American Muslims that creates room for a white woman, Ingrid Mattson to become president of ISNA, the causes of which include her own qualifications and merit, and allows for very little room for a black woman, Wadud, to join the mainstream discussion, despite her qualifications and merit.

3.1 The Case of Ingrid Mattson: Women's Leadership in the American Muslim Context and its Future Directions

How Ingrid Mattson rose through the ranks of ISNA to become president of the organization is astonishing to many American Muslims, including Muslim feminists whose scholarship is often marginalized by their communities. She demonstrated to ISNA's power structure, the Majlis al-Shura, which has been made up almost exclusively of men, with the exception of Khadija Hafajee, Amina Jandali, and the late Sharifa Alkhateeb who served on the Majlis at various times, that she is capable and qualified to be on the board with them and that she can lead the organization. The lineage of her training is exceptionally useful in this. She describes her predecessor Sheikh Muhammad Nur Abdullah, as her teacher who raised her interest and involvement in the organization.[1] Being the student of the former president, she is trusted to continue the same style of leadership, pace of reforms, and a similar outlook on Muslim life in America, including gender relations.

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[1]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 10.

In a December 2006 article in *Islamic Horizons*, Mattson acknowledges that "in electing a woman as head, ISNA members ma[d]e a powerful statement."[2] She recalls that in the first ISNA convention she attended in 1987, women presenters participated in panel discussions from the audience instead of joining the male panel members in the front of the room. Mattson did not view this as an expression of modesty even though as I discussed earlier she attributes lack of acknowledgement of women's Qur'an recitation to modesty. Mattson felt that women were unfairly excluded from participating fully on ISNA panels. Over the years this changed and women were allowed on panels and participated much more in ISNA activities. She attributes her election to observable shifts that have taken place in the Muslim community, although she does not directly discuss those changes in terms of rich scholarly and lay gender debates that have been happening since the late 80s until now. Upon her election she asked the council members if they were "willing to put up with the backlash."[3] In an interview with *Azizah Magazine*, she said, the supportive comments she received indicated to her that the community was ready for women to take on leadership positions.

Rather than exceptionalizing shifts in gender relations in Muslim communities, most interestingly, Mattson contextualizes her election in a broader American religious landscape: "we should take note of the fact that three mainline Protestant denominations elected or selected their first women leaders in 2006."[4] This mirrors another theme in her remarks on Muslim women's religious authority, that "Muslims are not unique among faith communities in trying to distinguish what is authentic and unchanging in religious tradition from gender discrimination that must simply be left to the past."[5] In her view, her election is symptomatic of a national shift in the American religious landscape that has begun to accept women's religious leadership as a whole. However, here Mattson is referring only to the kind of gender discrimination that has barred women

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[2]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 10.

[3]Mattson quoted in Taylor, 28.

[4]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 10.

[5]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 10.

from taking on public leadership in their communities, which include prescriptive roles as well as managerial and publicized leadership. Women have been holding clerical positions in the United States since the first congregational ordination of Antoinette Brown in 1853.

The distinction between a woman as a leader of a religious community as its executive officer and representative, which both Mattson and Wadud support, and the religious leader of a community who plays ritual functions and an advisory role for Muslims which is contested, is a fine point but important in understanding the American religious context as well as the comparative success of women's ordination in non-Muslim traditions. While women's ordination movements have been taking place for a long time, they are marginal movements that become acceptable or even mainstream largely through schismatic religious movements, such as some reform and reconstructionist American Jewish communities who have women rabbis and some American protestant traditions with women ministers.[6] The larger communities from which they split, sometimes because of the very issue of women's ordination, continue to reject women performing clerical positions. As such women's ordination movements gain some currency and women clergy become authoritative, but only within their groups and perhaps in interfaith settings.

On the flip side, we see that efforts by women to gain leadership positions in mainstream traditions are much more difficult, either out of lack of possibilities of schismatic movements, as is the case for Muslims, or out of their desire to keep their faith tradition intact while negotiating gender and authority, as is the case in Catholic women's ordination movements. Perhaps then, the difficulties of women to lead mainstream communities explains why as late as 2006, four major religious communities in the United States elected their first women leaders. If indeed the Muslim community is not exceptional in electing a woman, what then are the forces that have prompted these four American religious communities to make such noticeably different and important transitions? It appears that a multifactorial cause is at play, which includes increased

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[6]Wessinger, 5.

participation of women in their communities, an effect of democratization, and some kind of feminist (or pro-women) stance in which women consider themselves as worthy candidates compared to their male counterparts (even if unstated as such). If Muslims are not exceptional in electing a woman, this further intensifies the American Muslim community's location within the American religious landscape as followers of the same national trends.

In electing Mattson, are Muslims compensating for criticisms regarding Muslim gender relations leveled against the community by the American religious right and secular media? As I discussed in the first chapter, Ziba Mir-Hosseini and others have pointed out that many traditional communities have only become more sensitive to gender issues because of modernist or Western criticism of Islam, and so they subsequently begin defensive measures such as advocating for a 'separate but equal' model of gender relations. Critics of Mattson have pointed out that she provides a female face for the public relations of ISNA but that she also maintains the separate but equal, or gender complementarity model.[7] Simultaneously traditionalist critics claim that ISNA is being apologetic to Western criticism by responding to

> the U.N.'s dream of social engineering program among Muslims, i.e. to bring Muslim women out of their homes by using the eye-catching slogans such as 'Muslim Female Leadership.' [...] Only when Muslim females are brought out of their homes, the total destruction of the traditional Muslim family system can be assured.[8]

Regardless of these criticisms, Mattson's leadership of ISNA is historic and will be closely watched by both Muslim feminists as well as the traditionalists who reject women's leadership.

One of Mattson's goals as ISNA president is to facilitate Muslims' sense of belong-

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[7]Pamela Taylor "Men and Women in Islam: Complementary or Equal?" *Warped Galaxies: A Blog by Pamela K. Taylor*, entry posted November 30, 2006, http://www.pktaylor.com/pksblog/2006/11/men-and-women-in-islam-complementary.html (accessed June 9, 2009).

[8]Gohar Mushtaq, "Islam and the Issue of Female Leadership" *IQRA: A Voice of the Muslim Ummah* http://ccm-inc.org/iqra/index.php?page=0612female (accessed June 15, 2009).

ing to their communities by creating unity "without trying to impose uniformity." She proposes this will happen by engaging Muslims from diverse backgrounds who hold differing perspectives in conversation with one another in order to form consensus on "standards for our mosques and other religious institutions." Considering that about a third of the mosques do not allow women to serve on their boards and that about two-thirds of Muslims in the United States are un-mosqued, many for deliberate reasons of not feeling welcome in traditional or conservative Muslim institutions, this is a tall order.[9] She recognizes that "sincere and learned Muslims can arrive at different positions, whether the issues being deliberated are juridical, theological, or strategic."[10]

This goal of Mattson is challenging, given that there are vast disagreements between Muslims not only over theological points, including those on gender in the Qur'an, but also differences in cultural approaches, often with a privileging of Arabic and Middle Eastern perspectives as authentic. Within a given American city, the mosques are often established along ethnic lines with African-American mosques, Arab Mosques, South Asian Mosques, Turkish Mosques, etc., being some of the prominent categories. Increasingly as Wadud notes, gender segregation in the mosque has reached new levels in American mosques.[11]

Additionally it is Mattson's challenge to redeem ISNA's reputation of supporting exclusive interpretations of Muslim traditions and Islam. In an *Islamic Horizons* article she writes shortly after her election titled, "I Accept Your Trust," she invites American Muslims to "be a part of this conversation by sharing your ideas and experiences in

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[9]Bagby, 12, 56. Being un-mosqued does not mean that those without affiliation to a mosque are not religious.

[10]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 11.

[11]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 174. Even in new construction, such as the Al-Farooq Masjid in Atlanta, women are located in equally plush quarters but completely secluded on another floor in a sealed room with a screen over the windows, which block the view to the main prayer hall. The only access to the prayers and activities in the main hall is through two flat screen TVs and the audio sound system which has been known to fail on occasion, cutting the women off completely in the middle of prayers. See Zarqa Nawaz's film *Me and the Mosque* for similar narratives of women's experiences in Canadian Mosques.

institution building."[12] Although ISNA does not encompass all aspects of Muslim religious life, it is meant to provide a sense of belonging in America at the deepest, level of having an institution that helps them call America home.

To this end Mattson advocates that Muslims should take part in civic and political life and inter-faith dialogue, much in the same way as historians of American religions describe is characteristic of other American religious communities. Scholar of congregationalism in America, Mark Chaves, says that religious communities in the United States have lobbied and advocated for certain policies to be enacted that are in line with their values and beliefs. However, Chaves says that religious communities often do a poor job of engaging fully in civic life because they often rely on secular institutions to carryout community services even though civic engagement remains a hallmark of American religious communities.[13] Mattson says it is part of American Muslims' responsibilities as American citizens and being exceptional Muslims to shape political discourse on domestic and foreign policies and human rights.

Exceptionalism, or the theory that American religious communities are unique in this world because of the context and values that have shaped them, is a characteristic that Mattson believes the American Muslim community possesses. She says, "Collectively, the Muslims of North America have been blessed by God with greater opportunities than most of our brothers and sisters in other parts of the world," and in the United States in particular, "the freedom, stability, and strong moral foundation [...] are great blessings for all Americans, particularly for Muslims."[14] In accordance with Nathan Hatch's thesis about the democratization of power in American religious communities, "Muslims have pushed and been allowed to democratize their governing bodies. Important decisions, even relating to theological and legal matters, are increasingly made in mosques and Islamic organizations by elected boards or the collective

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[12]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 11.

[13]Chaves, 73.

[14]Mattson, "I Accept Your Trust," 11 and Ingrid Mattson "American Muslims Have a 'Special Obligation'" *Beliefnet.com* http://www.beliefnet.com/Faiths/Islam/2001/10/American-Muslims-Have-A-Special-Obligation.aspx (accessed June 12, 2009): 1.

membership."[15] But this exceptionalism comes with responsibility:

> Muslims who live in America are being tested by God to see if we will be satisfied with a self-contained, self-serving Muslim community [...] or if we will use the many opportunities available to us to change the world for the better–beginning with an honest critical evaluation of our own flaws. Because we have freedom and wealth, we have a special obligation to help those Muslims who do not [...] [16]

Omid Safi has said it is the goal of a Progressive Muslim to criticize Muslims not out of a hatred of Islam, but rather out of love for their tradition and faith-position, in order to bring about reform that respects human dignity.[17] For Mattson one key strategy is to use *ijtihad*: "American Muslim leaders will be heard only if they are recognized as authentic interpreters of Islam among the global community."[18] American Muslims must share the successes they have had in the United States and contribute to reforming scholarship.

American Muslims must also participate in politics and civic life, another marker of the American religious landscape. Aware of the double bind in which this puts many Muslims who are critical of American foreign policy that brings harm to millions of Muslims worldwide, Mattson says, "in our desire to show ourselves to be patriotic Americans, we cannot suppress our criticisms of the United States when we have them."[19] In fact American Muslim advocacy can help steer both foreign and domestic policies related to Muslims and human rights. Likewise participation in civil society is important for similar reasons of representation, as well as expression of Muslim exceptionalism in helping those in need. Mattson promotes inter-faith dialogue and projects that: "If we Muslims are serious about our values, we will make alliances with people of

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[15]Mattson, "'Special Obligation,'" 1.

[16]Mattson, "'Special Obligation,'" 2.

[17]Omid Safi "Introduction: *The times they are a-changin'* – a Muslim Quest for Justice, Gender Equality and Pluralism" in *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism*, edited by Omid Safi (Oxford: Oneworld, 1994), 4.

[18]Mattson, "'Special Obligation,'" 2.

[19]Mattson, "'Special Obligation,'" 3.

good will who wish to promote important causes."[20] She wants to help "Muslims build strong communities that support their members, communities that establish institutions, schools and mas[j]ids, to educate ourselves and others on what it means to be Muslim in America."[21] To her that identity is an expression of Muslim exceptionalism–that Muslims in America are particularly blessed and "have ideals of charity and real economics. The role of [her] leadership is to implement those principles."[22]

Regarding her goals, Mattson says further, "what I really hope to see is a continued growth in Muslim professional organizations, interfaith organizations, the alliances between those people who believe in social justice and civil liberties, who believe that alleviating poverty is an important issue. That's really where we need to demonstrate the universal ethical basis of our faith."[23] Because of American Muslims' exceptional situation they should volunteer for "political, civic, and faith initiatives for enjoining in good and fulfilling the *fard kifaya*" or collective obligation of the Muslim community.[24] These goals mirror in form, organization and underlying values the so-called exceptionalism of American religions.

How is her leadership different from the previous ISNA presidents who have all been immigrant men? She characterizes it as leadership focused on building a strong foundation for the Muslim community in contrast to male leadership. Muqtedar Khan, a political science professor in University of Delaware, criticizes her for being too soft:

> She's not radical on anything. She's allowed ISNA to take strong positions against terrorism, but she'll never be at odds with the government. You won't see any criticism of U.S. policies. You'll see her continue the talk about the diversity within Islam. She'll make her mark as an activist with

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[20]Mattson, "'I Accept Your Trust," 11.

[21]Mattson quoted in Taylor, 30.

[22]Mattson quoted in Taylor, 30.

[23]Ingrid Mattson Quoted in Kim Lawton, "Interview: Dr. Ingrid Mattson," *Religion and Ethics News Weekly* (September 2002).

[24]Ingrid Mattson, "The Axis of Good: Muslims Building Alliances with Other Communities of Faith," *McDonald Center for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations Hartford Seminary*, http://macdonald.hartsem.edu/mattsonart3.htm (accessed June 1, 2009).

things like her chaplaincy program but not as a scholar with influential ideas or someone who modernizes thinking within Islam.[25]

He ignores that the chaplaincy program, especially including women within it, is a reformist idea with the potential for far-reaching consequences on Muslim spiritual and religious authority and ultimately Muslim gender relations. Is that not a modernizing move? She responds, "That's the 'great man' theory of history. Look where that's gotten us. I want to build something. I'm interested in long-term institutional strength."[26] Not focused on her legacy, she is looking for tangible ways to include more Muslims on the institutional level.

Within Mattson's discourse and goals for ISNA we see themes from the American religious context emerging. She compares her election to broader trends in American religious institutions. Her goals for ISNA while in office reflect taking advantage of exceptionalism of the religious community, volunteerism in both community service activities as well as in civic, political, and interfaith dialogue, and are all ambitions shared by religious communities across traditions. Additionally Mattson contextualizes her appeals to the Muslim community by drawing on Muslim theological constructs and the Prophet's Sunnah, which can only be understood using a lens focused on Islam. Like Wadud she draws on ethics of Islam to advocate for change, but only on an individualistic level or regarding Muslims' obligations toward non-Muslims, and not necessarily in a construct of improving gender relations, which is the realm of *ijtihad*. Additionally, unlike Wadud, whose call for *ijtihad* is constructed through her sense of Islamic ethics, Mattson's inspiration of reform is unstated and thereby is more familiar to the American Muslim context, which uses language of inclusion and participation, and sees gradual change, such as their first election of a woman after 43 years of existence, as an expression of taking cues from the American religious context.

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[25]Quoted in Cathy Lynn Grossman, "The Face of Islam in America," *USA Today*, August 21, 2007.

[26]Quoted in Grossman.

3.2 Mattson's Chaplaincy Program

While holding positions on the mosque boards, running Islamic schools, representing the community, etc., are positions that Mattson says should be open to women, they do not necessarily require clerical training. In fact, I argue that these are positions contribute to the democratization of American Muslim communities, because lay intellectuals and active members play key roles in representing the community and making its governing policies. There is an opening in Mattson's vision of women's potential as religious leaders (as opposed to representative leaders of religious communities, which I have already discussed). The Muslim Chaplaincy is a new opportunity for women's leadership of Muslim communities that Mattson feels is not a violation of Islamic traditions because it is the role of community leader, religious leader, or leader in *duas* or supplications, to constituents such as students, patients, Muslims in the armed forces, and prison inmates.

For Mattson women's training for becoming chaplains is a revival of Muslim tradition:

> increasing numbers of Muslim women have found new confidence and acceptance in the field of Islamic scholarship [...] Confidence springs from the knowledge that it is not an innovation to have women authoritatively and publicly interpreting and teaching Islamic texts; rather, this is a renewal of the spirit of the early Islamic community.[27]

In her view, when scholarly Muslim women attain the kind of qualifications and training that typically male scholars or imams do, they demonstrate that the act of attaining scholarship is un-gendered and that the only difference between them in their capacity to gain knowledge itself and lead other Muslims and male scholars and imams is their gender and inability to lead mixed gender prayers. In Wadud's opinion, the fact that women can attain the same qualifications, level of piety, and other characteristics sought in an imam, shows there is a sexist presupposition that bars them from leading prayers.

Mattson's compromise is that the role of Chaplain is gender non-specific and creates

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[27]Mattson, "Can a Woman be an Imam," 6.

openings for women to take on a position of leadership and tasks performed by imams, excluding leading mixed-gender *salat* in order to preserve the Prophet's Sunnah. In essence when they have the training from master's degree programs such as the Islamic Chaplaincy Program at Hartford Seminary, they can serve in the roles that imams often play, *sans* prayer *imamat.* They are trained in

> the responsibilities of Muslim chaplains surrounding life events such as birth, death, marriage, or loss, the rituals surrounding these life events, examination of Islamic law, which includes ethics and morality and which undergirds all Islamic rituals, the application of Islamic law to daily life, exposure to and understanding of chaplaincy skills in multi-faith settings, understanding of faith traditions other than one's own [...] pastoral care, arts of ministry and multi-faith relations skills needed to serve as chaplains.[28]

Much of the forms and functions of chaplaincy mirror clerical training because often the needs of American Muslims in American institutions such as the university, armed forces, and even prison are similar to that of non-Muslims. Offering individualized spiritual support in hospitals is not commonplace in many Muslim countries. The position of Muslim/ah chaplain, along with usage of the terms and functions of chaplaincy, itself then becomes an expression of Muslim authority in an American context. It is a response to and indeed a part of the American religious landscape. Because Muslims are present on all institutional levels in the United States, they require pastoral care at all the same moments of spiritual need as their non-Muslim counterparts. As Bruce Lawrence predicts, this particular example of Muslim life in the United States more closely resembles the form and function of Christian leadership than of foreign Muslim religious authority. It is also an opening for women.

In truth, the program at Hartford Seminary is really one of only a couple of Muslim chaplaincy programs in America, one that accepts women, and is additionally recognized by American prison systems, the armed forces, hospitals, and other institutions

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[28]Programgram Details. *Hartford Seminary's Islamic Chaplaincy Program.* http://macdonald.hartsem.edu/chaplaincy/program.html (accessed June 15, 2009).

in which chaplains, and not necessarily traditional imams are needed.[29] Recognition of Muslimah chaplains is an entirely different question. Because religious authority is traditionally thought of as male, acceptance of Muslim women chaplains is not simple. In a famous case Lt. Sharida Hussein, a trained Muslimah chaplain, was barred from serving as a military chaplain by the U.S. armed forces, which cited that women do not hold these roles in Islam.[30] Though this was later overturned, the army's ruling on an internal Muslim debate on whether women can hold positions of chaplain not only raised the question of who can take on the role of leading Muslims in America, but also who has the authority to approve Muslim authority. Many other Muslimah chaplains serve women's prison populations and hospitals, where they are usually welcome.

Through this program Muslim chaplains are qualified to serve both Muslims and non-Muslims. The Muslim chaplaincy program itself is modeled after a Protestant framework of pastoral care and the only government accredited program for Muslims. An example of Protestantization of language used to describe and formulate Muslim leadership in America, the term chaplaincy and the model of pastoral care shows an interesting shift in who shapes new Muslim authorities, away from Muslim communities themselves, but towards Protestant education centers catering to American institutional demands. In order to have systematic standards for religious offices of all faiths, the demands of American institutions such as higher education, the army, prisons, and hospitals, necessitate that Muslim religious leadership fits in with the existent model of offices for the clergy.

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[29]Often university chaplains (mostly men and a few women) are professors in Islamic studies without chaplaincy training, or worse, are religious men without any scholarly training.

[30]Ali, Kecia. "Acting on Frontier of Religious Ceremony: With Questions and Quiet Resolve, a Woman Officiates at a Muslim Wedding" *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 32, no. 4, (2004): http://www.hds.harvard.edu/news/bulletin/articles/ali_ceremony.html

3.3 Theoretical Concerns with Feminism: Reading as a Woman or as a Muslim Feminist

Despite the fact that Mattson does not profess to write her history of the Qur'an in Muslim memory from a feminist or woman's perspective, it does not escape religious studies professor Tamara Sonn's attention that Mattson is a woman. She notes in her review on the back cover of *The Story of the Qur'an*: "Perhaps most importantly, this text is the first full introduction to the study of the Qur'an from the perspective of a Western Muslim woman [...]."[31] What does it mean that this is the first work of its kind by a Western Muslim woman? Why does her gender matter? Are woman scholars expected to adopt pro-women or feminist approaches, especially if they are writing in a male dominated field? Will their work be read as feminist or relegated as "the women's perspective?" How does a self-professed non-feminist woman scholar speak on gender? Although these questions relate to issues tackled in the field of women's studies, they carry implications regarding the direction Muslim women's scholarly and lay discourses take. Within the United States, there exists a wide spectrum of approaches to gender debates, not limited to woman-led prayers, such as reform of marriage and divorce, advanced education for women, domestic violence, and more. Therefore the engagement with feminism, or the lack thereof, must be considered seriously.

There is a long history of women interpreting scripture in the Americas since colonial times. The famous Salem witch trials were accusations of witchcraft against women who had dissented against the clergy's authority. Beginning with the women's bible movement in the late 18th and early 19th century, feminist theology is now a proper subfield in American religious scholarship across religious traditions: Aysha Hidayatullah argues that the appearance of a number of works on the Quran have constituted an emerging subfield of Muslim feminist theology in the United States.[32] Although some

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[31]Back cover of Mattson, *The Story of the Qur'an*

[32]Hidayatullah, Aysha, "Women Trustees of Allah: Methods, Limits, and Possibilities of 'Feminist Theology' in Islam," Dissertation. University of California, Santa Barbara, 2009, 62.

of the issues are the same, such as un-reading patriarchy from scripture, not all religious women maintain feminist positions; rather they take advantage of the spaces created for them in their communities as a result of democratization. Anne Braude explains that "some activists have assumed that religious women are apologists for patriarchy who suffer from false consciousness or that their allegiance to religious communities or organizations makes them incapable of authentic advocacy on women's behalf."[33] However, she holds that every religious community in America "has been changed by the encounter [with feminism or pro-feminism], whether by embrace of feminism or by its rejection."[34]

In the works of both Ingrid Mattson and Amina Wadud there appears a tension with the terms of feminism as constructed in the United States and drawn upon by women activists and theologians. Neither of them uses the term feminist to describe themselves. As I discussed earlier, despite Mattson's pro-woman stance in her scholarship and public intellectual work, she considers the American Muslim community's engagement with gender issues on par with that of other communities. In the case of Wadud, it is only recently that she has used the word pro-feminist to characterize her position. Meanwhile both women have admitted that modernity, the American context, and even in the case of Wadud, second wave feminism affected their understanding of Islam and gender. In this section I will explore this tension as a means to understanding Wadud's and Mattson's positions on women's leadership and gender relations in the context of broader gender debates and engagements with feminism in and outside of the United States. Before I can ask whether Mattson and Wadud are feminists, I must ask which definition of feminism am I using, and more importantly, what is the range of definitions applicable to American Muslim women with reform agendas?

Feminism is a political, academic, and activist stance on improving women's status and condition in society, recognizing patriarchy and systematic inequality of women and

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[33]Ann Braude, "Religions and Modern Feminism," *Encyclopedia of women and religion in North America,* edited by Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 12.

[34]Braude, 12.

men. While the origins of feminism in academia, as an academic project which Rita Gross calls women's studies, can be appropriated by the so-called "Western Academy," feminism as a position that seeks the improvement and empowerment of women cannot be appropriated to the West, in a dichotomous fashion that divides Western and Eastern thought, such that the former is enlightened and feminist and the latter is benighted and oppressive to women. Gross argues that "the single greatest weakness of feminist thinking about religion [...] is that so much of it is primarily Western, and even primarily Christian."[35] When we define feminism as resistance to patriarchy, it is a position that has and will continue to exist across cultures, religions, and even to varying extents across time periods.

Braude says with respect to America that "Feminism, the view that society should be transformed to include the full participation of women [and] has been a key factor in influencing the distinctive shape of religious life in modern America."[36] This definition of feminism is specific to America and is based on inclusion on all levels of religious life. Though grounded in ethics, the terms of inclusion and participation on equal footing as men is the language of anti-discrimination laws in the United States and even of affirmative action, which seeks to create opportunities for those who have systematically been rejected. This kind of feminism of inclusion and equal opportunities is particularly American because it matches the legal language and historical trajectory of incorporating under-represented groups in mainstream systems.

Both definitions, feminism broadly defined as resistance to patriarchy and feminism more specifically defined as inclusion of women, signify a position in favor of women's advancement. On those levels Mattson and Wadud fit under a feminist category, in the broader sense as well as in the more specific American religious sense of women's participation. However, the very concept of feminism, along with feminist theory, has been appropriated by many Western feminists as an exclusively western position.

From the perspective of many colonized Muslims, feminism was used by the colonial

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[35]Gross, Rita, *Feminism and Religion: An Introduction*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1996, 56.

[36]Braude, 11.

enterprise in polemics on the backwardness of Muslim civilization and as a justification of conquering them. The language of colonialism included heavy rhetoric about liberating Muslim women from the veil of oppression with the enlightened feminist position. Leila Ahmed cites the famous example of Lord Cromer, the British counsul-general in Egypt who stated that part of the civilizing mission of Britain in Egypt was to prevent the degradation of Egyptian women at the hands of Egyptian men, while simultaneously doing little to bring educational reform for Egyptian woman and being the founding president of an organization opposed to Women's suffrage.[37] The language of feminism was just a colonial tool since the colonizers did not necessarily have a stake in civilizing or even helping their subjects, but more importantly, the terms of feminism became associated with the destruction of Muslim society.[38] It was always presented as a foreign, civilizing concept, and therefore even when Muslim women on their own volition had and continue to make any pro-women arguments, they are seen as suspicious and routinely rejected as feminist, used in this sense as a bad word standing in for westernized. In the past even Mattson has been accused of being "more interested in serving a feminist agenda than an Islamic one" when she publicly criticized the Taliban in a move to promote Muslims to combat injustices carried out by other Muslims.[39] Wadud reminds us that even recognizing pro-women elements within Islamic traditions and the Qur'an in order to bring reform to Muslim communities becomes suspect as a feminist project because supposedly Islam already gave rights to women 1400 years ago and the arguments need not be rehashed anew.

Even before one includes theology in the discussion, the exclusion of Muslim feminist critique from Muslim discourse has a lot to do with feminist theory's theorization as exclusively Western and secular. Wadud says that, "[...] Liberal theories of the West were categorically rejected as un-Islamic and therefore could never be seriously

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[37]Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Roots of a Modern Debate*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 153.

[38]Additionally, as Margot Badran and others have suggested a kind of indigenous feminism did emerge in the form of anti-colonial, nationalistic movements in Egypt.

[39]Mattson, "'Special Obligation,'" 1.

considered viable options for Muslims."[40] Claiming that feminist theology and feminism itself is an expression of Americanness raises questions regarding the authenticity of Muslims Feminist theologians and their reception in Muslim communities. Just as Bruce Lawrence says about Civil Society, I contend that feminism "was global before it was theorized as Western and secular."[41] It remains global, as it appears all over the world in multiple historical circumstances, and it continues to be spurred by secular, religious, cultural, nationalistic, and other convictions.

Within Wadud's work in particular, we are able to sense her anxiety with engaging and using the term feminism. She connects the backdrop of feminism with her interest in Islam as a medium of empowerment: "I entered Islam during the important second-wave feminist movement in the West [...] In 1972, Islam offered me an escape from the overwhelming phenomenon of double oppression as an African-American woman."[42] She sought to elevate herself from gender inequality in the United States, as well as racism, which I will discuss in the next section, through embracing Islam. This wholly transformed her such that her gender egalitarian ideas and activism came to be inspired by the Qur'an: "my motivation as always been pro-faith in perspective. Any comparative analysis with secular Western theories or strategies for mainstreaming women in all aspects of human development and governance is coincidental and secondary."[43]

As such, it is Wadud's goal to bring about change in Islamic thought and Muslim gender debates, not bridging a gap between Western or secular feminism, rather "through its own egalitarian tendencies, principles, articulations, and implications into a dynamic system with practices that fulfill its goals of justice [...]."[44] She places "[her] research and [her] personal identity within the larger framework of modern thought and practice for greater justice within an indigenous Islamic worldview rather than as

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[40]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 113.

[41]Lawrence, 65.

[42]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 3, 59.

[43]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 16.

[44]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 2.

a mere by-product of or reaction to Western and secular developments, practices, and experiences of justice since the Enlightenment, not as a by-product reacting to Islamist discourse."[45] She wants to create an egalitarian Muslim discourse which is *sui generis*, its own kind. From the ground up, it is not connected to Western thought or traditionalist Muslim discourse. If Wadud's appeal for justice function is within an Islamic discourse, then how do we reconcile the American civil rights context and second-wave feminist movement that both left impressions on her?

This can be in part explained through her initial rejection of using the term feminist or even seeing her work on the Qur'an as part of a trajectory of feminist theology. Wadud makes no references to feminist theologians from other religious traditions in her work *Qur'an and Woman*. She makes only one reference to Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza in *Inside the Gender Jihad* to quote her definition of patriarchy.[46] Following her lengthy discussion of how she has never self-identified as a Muslim feminist in the same work, her subsequent use of the prefix *pro-* in her self-description of being pro-feminist in *Inside the Gender Jihad* shows her continued discomfort with using the term, perhaps because of the issues of legitimacy in the eyes of other Muslims: "[...] to respond to the status quo by using sources external to primal Islam, such as the writings of modern Western and Muslim secular feminists, was less effective. Status quo authorities would simply de-legitimize them publicly by marking everything outside of 'Islam' as un-Islamic."[47] Additionally she feels her position authentically originates from the Qur'an and the feminism is an extra-Islamic concept. Wadud admits "the origins of today's Muslim women's movements for greater empowerment and inclusion were heavily influenced by Western theoretical developments on women's rights and social justice."[48] However, she feels despite this connection with Western feminism that "[there is a] need for an indigenous Muslim theoretical and practical reconstruction in

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[45]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 10-11.

[46]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 96.

[47]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 113.

[48]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 8.

the human rights discourse more appropriate to our own Islamic theoretical origins."[49] That need is beginning to be fulfilled by some Muslim women's movements that argue in favor of greater women's rights despite being uninspired by the existence of western feminism, such as those in Iran and Malaysia which make Islamic theological and legal arguments in addition to taking human rights perspectives.

Another way she reconciles feminism and her desire to exclusively argue from within an Islamic framework is that she recognizes the origins of feminism as a western, colonial construction, but does not equate the very concept of egalitarianism with western ideals. Because she finds human equality in the Qur'an, as a function of belief in *tawhid*, feminism is but merely a tool which is to be used with tools within Islamic sciences in order to produce reform:

> It is not surprising that the modern movement toward full human rights for women in Islam started outside an Islamic framework, or was influenced by eastern colonialist or Western feminist discourses. The step to move women's rights' discourse back into the core of the Islamic worldview was radical, for several reasons. The first reason was that it points to the means for 'dismantling the master's house' by using the 'master's tools.' By invoking usul methodology, rules formulated by earlier generations of exclusively male Muslim thinkers could be shown in their wide diversity and internal self-interrogation [that] the aim is not to deconstruct Islam, but to radically reconstruct the tradition from within [...][50]

She further reconciles the two sides as follows:

> Some would assert that the very idea of gender justice, as first conceived and exerted as crucial to society, along with particular practices of gender inclusiveness and mainstreaming, as well as the essential integration of gender as a category of thought, are Western ideals in juxtaposition to certain central ideas and practices throughout Islamic history. Others have rushed to conclude that gender justice is impossible in Islam itself, on the grounds that feminism originates in the West and is therefore incongruent with Islam [...] Yet many other thinking believers in Islam have engaged in a struggle to demonstrate a correlation between Islamic ideas of justice

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[49]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 8.

[50]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 112.

and more recent global developments about the potential of women as full human beings in light of more gender-explicit analysis.[51]

Firstly, when she discusses the correlation between Islamic justice and feminism she calls them "global developments" rather than claiming that the affects of Western feminism on Muslims have caused Muslims to think of equality for the first time. In other words, critique of gender relations is a global development.

In her work on generational differences in definitions of feminism amongst second and third wave feminists, Astrid Henry asks the question "whose feminism" are we discussing – to whom does it belong. Although she grounds herself in U.S. feminism and qualifies her position within her western context and comes to the conclusion that the definition of feminism for each generation is their own and authentic for its time, Henry makes far reaching claims regarding feminism as a whole, which includes feminist ideals worldwide. The transition from second to third wave feminism is premised on inclusion of women who were ignored in the former such as women of color, non-Western women, or women of less socioeconomic privilege. However the entire frame of reference of this transition to third wave feminism remains that of white women who are making space, or allowing women of other backgrounds, cultures, races, to join the Western, predominately white, conversation. The first, second, and third wave feminist movements (or Feminism with a capital F or Western Feminism) does not necessarily reflect the very premise of feminism, or the active or political position of feminism, which is generic and cannot be appropriated to Western Feminism. Wadud notes that "despite categorization of the Western feminist movement into stages – first wave, second wave, etc. – there is an internal critique if these stages are consistent with the work women have been doing for centuries to challenge male hegemony, privilege, and authority."[52]

In addition to the generational limitation of Western feminism, there is a global dimension to feminist discourse and movements which is missing from the waves formulation, even though the multicultural dimension of feminism within the West sought

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[51]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 2.

[52]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 263.

to be incorporated in the third wave. A problem with dividing feminism into waves is that it precludes discussion of resistance to patriarchy before the advent of the first wave and locates the origins of feminist activities and writing exclusively in the West. The second problem is that upon awareness of global voices and what Gayatri Spivak calls epistemic violence to non-Western subjects' agency, third wave feminism became plural and included feminisms from around the world within the West; feminism in non-Western or minority contexts grew from exposure to Western feminism and did not exist before greater Western presence globally.

Even though the discussion of third wave feminism includes minority women's voices, the central narrative is still within the paradigm of Western Feminists being primary, having a monopoly on the idea of feminism and "allowing" others to contribute to the meaning of feminism. The fundamental idea that women of color or women from non-western places too can and have had meaningful discourse and activism on feminist ideals from first principles, all on their own terms and originating in their own histories, is still missing. Ultimately the discourse of first, second, and third wave feminisms contributes to dichotomous division of Eastern vs. Western thought, orientalist othering of Muslim women and their feminist moves.

Along with the fact that so-called feminist ideals and the idea of liberating Muslim women from their oppressive religion was part of the colonial rhetoric, and that many feminist groups across Europe lent their support to the colonial project on this basis, the assumption that feminism is an incompatible or an inauthentic position for Muslims to take creates a distance between Feminist discourse (with a capital F, denoting Western appropriation of feminism) and Muslim feminist thought (feminist with a lower case F, denoting the critical position).

In a 1986 essay, Sheila Radford-Hill says that minority women who can not identify with the dominant discourses of white middle class feminism, but are still interested participants of feminist discourse, find it difficult to prevent marginalization of their experiences by the dominant white feminist culture on the one hand, and feel that they

betray their own minority communities.[53] For many Muslim feminists this kind of bind is familiar: although gender discrimination is a common factor (as well as activism to eradicate that), much of the resentment toward feminism stems from the exoticising of Muslim women, rejection of their feminism, and paternalistic efforts to teach Muslim women about their rights if they left Islam (even by other feminists, such as Marxist feminists or secular feminists). The pro-faith position becomes a key factor in Muslim feminist discourse since it roots the pro-women stance in religion itself.

In one attempt to describe Muslim women's feminist activities and writing, scholars such as Miriam Cooke, Margot Badran, and others have coined the term Islamic feminism as a multiple critique (which has more facets of criticism than W.E.B DuBois's double critique), which address colonial violence and subordination of Muslims as well as patriarchal tendencies in Muslim communities that seek control over them in an expression of Islamic identity. Muslim feminist moves are met with suspicion by both traditional Muslim communities as well as Western feminists. Cooke has theorized that Islamic feminists engage in multiple critique in putting forward their positions, criticizing both western notions of them as well as Muslim rejection of feminist ideas as Western hegemony. As Sa'adiyya Shaikh points out, this construction of Islamic feminism and multiple critique is helpful in categorizing gender debates, but ignores the possibility of egalitarian ideas growing "organically" from Qur'anic and other Islamic discourses. The construction of Islamic feminism in Badran and Cooke, then emphasizes Arab, South Africa, or other nationalistic locations of feminist contestation as primary, while tying in Islam as a common denominator and the site for contestation, rather than the national scene (i.e., parliament, NGOs, etc).

Although many Muslim feminist scholars, particularly those who engage with the Qur'an and Prophetic traditions, do not use the term feminist to position themselves because of its tainted historical alliance with colonialism, I argue that their reading of Islamic discourses not only shows compatibility of their feminism and their Islam, but

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[53]Sheila Radford-Hill, "Considering Feminism as a Model for Social Change" in *Feminist Studies/Critical Studies* edited by Teresa de Lauretis (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 160.

also demonstrates that their feminist discourse upsets the appropriation of feminism as a Western discourse. Mattson and Wadud's discourse *is* a feminist discourse if only we are able to use the term defined as pro-women and distance it from its tainted history in colonial and contemporary polemics against Islam, which are the main reasons why they do not use the term in the first place. Additionally, even though I argue that the American religious context has shaped their discourses, it is not because Wadud and Mattson are American that they have feminist sensibilities, even if that may be a feature of being a woman scholar of faith in America. While Mattson's and Wadud's positions may be feminist and a product of being in the American environments, their sense of feminism is expressed through equal opportunities for men and women, an active stance which they root in Islamic discourse; they use same language of representation and affirmative action as used in anti-discrimination laws in the U.S. Their Muslim feminist ideals are packaged in the language of American legal and political discourse, while the Muslim feminist ideals of Malaysian or South African scholars and activists reflect the legal and cultural language of their own contexts. However, they all may draw on the Qur'an, Islamic ethics, and even the Islamic legal tradition as their inspiration and rationale. The American religious feminist context is relevant for Mattson and Wadud insofar as it inspires similar moves that women in other traditions make and the methods and arguments they employ to make them.

3.4   Race and Gender

The multiplicity of ethnic communities and racial diversity among American Muslims is probably a major distinguishing factor between the American Muslim community and Muslims elsewhere. So far in this thesis I have treated the positions of Amina Wadud and Ingrid Mattson with respect to women's religious authority in the context of the American religious landscape. This includes American religions' encounter with feminism and conceptions of Islam as an American religion that fosters participation from

women through democratization. The commonly observed division of American Muslims into African-American and Immigrant Muslim communities or indigenous Muslims and Immigrant Muslims implies a racialized community that warrants the theorization of race amongst Muslims in America. While that is only possible in an extended project, in this section I will particularly locate Wadud's and Mattson's debates over women's religious authority in the context of race in the American Muslim community.

American race theorist Joe Feagin says "Many categorizations that people make in their important interpretive frames utilize prototypes [...] From the beginning, the white racial frame has made the prototypical 'superior racial group to be white American and the prototypical 'inferior racial group to be black American.[54] The prototypical race discourse focusing on the dichotomous black and white races, Feagin says, has led to black exceptionalism, or the idea that blacks have experienced the longest unparalleled racial oppression and therefore have the central and only claim on compensatory race discourse to the exclusion of other racial groups that have experienced similar paradigms of racial injustice with respect to white hegemony such as Native Americans and colonial subjects.[55] This is perhaps what complicates mostly brown, immigrant Muslims place in American race relations, and in existing dichotomous racial paradigms prior to their arrival. However, after 9/11 those who seem to fit Muslim racial features are recipients of racial profiling in a systematic way, which suggests, as Bruce Lawrence advocates, that Muslims in America, despite their diversity, form a racial category which enables them to join national debates on removing racial discrimination. The question when discussing American Muslims' place in American racial discourse then becomes how much primacy should be given to particulars of African American, Arab, South Asian, Hispanic, White, and other racial contexts in exceptional ways, at the cost of compromising unified American Muslim identity, if there is such a thing. A related question is how much does Islamic identity permeate American Muslim self-

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[54]Feagin, Joe, *The White Racial Frame: Centuries of Racial Framing and Counter-Framing*, New York: Routledge, 2010, 57.

[55]Feagin, 22-27, 59-66.

understanding.

Situating Wadud's writing in the context of race in America is crucial to under-standing her position on women assuming religious authority, and the reactions to her position. Similar to the impressions that second wave feminism left on Wadud during the time of her conversion, she recalls: "The development of my moral awareness started during the height of the American civil rights movement under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr."[56] Her very approach to Islam is shaped and originates with her experiences of growing up African American in America: "the origin of three decades of work on Islam, justice, and gender was the awesome light of belief that I inherited from my father, a man of faith, and a Methodist minister who was born and died poor, black, and oppressed in the context of racist America."[57] She says part of the "double oppression" of being an African-American woman, is surviving the "awesome legacy of the soul and survival of African slaves brutalized by the dehumanization of the institution of slavery in its peculiarly cruel American racist form."[58] Here issues of gender and race are not separate. Conversion to Islam promised to her entrance to a model of gender relations based on maintenance and care for women, a protection missing in African-American communities because of the destruction of "traditional families by slavery itself, and the coercive power of discrimination afterwards."[59] She explains the appeal of Islam in this context:

> Part of Islam's mystique for females in larger groups of oppressed people, struggling for collective survival, is the appeal that they have been unable to experience: masculine honor and protection of the raised pedestal [...] as a young, poor, black female entering Islam, [...] romantic images and notions of Muslim women's honor were accepted without critical examina-tion. Local discourse assured females in transition that instead of being oppressed by the necessity to struggle in the white male, sexist, racist, and capitalistic world of paid empowerment and the cutting double standards

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[56]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 4.

[57]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 4.

[58]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 102.

[59]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 103.

politically, Islam offered care, protection, financial support, and adoration for women, which would provide escape from that struggle and a rise onto that pedestal.[60]

American Muslim discourse of Islam promised a vision of gender relations in which women would be taken care of in a patriarchal system, even if that were not true, particularly in African-American Muslim communities which continue to suffer from the legacy of slavery and post-slavery causes of family dysfunction.

At the time of her conversion, she recalls being "unaware of the full breadth of the experiences and politics of gender in Muslim history and societies."[61] She approached the Qur'an, which she holds as the sole inspiration for her conversion, with a fresh lens; not knowing Muslim gender experiences she found gender and racial equality in the text. Her response to Islamic laws which create the sense of patriarchal security for women is based on her experience of racial disparities in America: "Islamic personal law is built upon a notion of family that does not include a woman thrown into the desert, forced to construct a healthy, happy life for her child and to fend for herself," analogous to many African-American women, including herself, who are the sole heads of their households out of necessity.[62]

Wadud proposes an alternative Islamic family model based on the Qur'anic story of Ibrahim's wife, who is remembered as Hajar in Muslim folklore (she is not mentioned by name in the Qur'an). As a result of God's will, she was separated from Ibrahim and found herself alone in the desert with a young baby, Ismail. Wadud argues that this model of the single mother or woman-led family is just as Islamic as a traditional family model, given that it is part of the experience of the earliest believers in *tawhid* in a test by God, is a Qur'anic message, and constantly remembered through the rites of Muslim pilgrimage. She takes into consideration "the reality for Muslim women heads of households whose legal category in Shari'ah deviates from the patriarchal,

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[60]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 59.

[61]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 87.

[62]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 144.

man-centered norm. Yet it is through the law they expect their honor and dignity to be upheld."[63] The Hajar paradigm is also her attempt to locate racial issues in the U.S., regarding African-American Muslim families, in an Islamic legal framework. It is to draw on the religious authority of women, their ability to be leaders of their families, communities, and the next generation of Muslims. Casting the woman-led African-American Muslim family as Islamic is to connect racial issues in the U.S. and to establish women as legitimate leaders. In her own experience of conversion to Islam, she expected the protection promised to her in Muslim discourse, but never received that theoretical support. Her advocacy of Islamic legal reform speaks from experience of race based disparities in America, and specifically seeks to palliate the situation that she has confronted as an African-American woman. Thus, regardless of the presence of absence or men, the Hajar paradigm of the Islamic family enables women to be leaders.

Carolyn Rouse and Jamillah Karim argue that African-American Muslim women converts are black feminists who see their themselves as inheritors of the legacy of feminism of women converts to the Nation of Islam: "How Sunni African-American Muslim women remember the Nation reveals not only their place within Black feminist tradition but also the enduring contribution that they bring to this tradition."[64] Rather than viewing gender relations in Muslim communities as a betrayal of Islamic ideals as Wadud does, Rouse and Karim argue that adopting traditional gender roles in Islamic law is an expression of feminism.[65]

In her article, "Through Sunni Women's Eyes: Black Feminism and the Nation of Islam," Karim discusses the story of women who were attracted to the Nation of Islam because it allowed them to love themselves and their race. The set up of gender relations in which men are providers who must obey Islam, created a sense of security that other black women lacked. For Karim, this is black feminism. Rouse says that

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[63]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 150.

[64]Jamillah Karim, "Through Sunni Women's Eyes: Black Feminism and the Nation of Islam," *Souls* 8, no. 4 (Fall 2006): 20.

[65]Rouse, Carolyn. *Engaged Surrender: African American Women and Islam*, Berkley: University of California Press, 2004,150.

Sunni African-American women, new converts or those who have transitioned from the Nation of Islam, continue to claim domestic gender roles for themselves, and expect men to be providers, in their approach to Islam as a better way of life for themselves and their children. Rouse also says that unlike other Black feminists who put their experiences of gender and race discrimination at the center of their claims to feminism, African-American Muslim women are feminist through putting textual sources, namely the Qur'an, *tafsir*, hadith, and Sunnah at the center of their feminist claims.[66] They read the example of the Prophet and the reforms of the Qur'an as pro-women sources and even interpret verses that command obedience to husbands. Karim says that this is their feminism:

> Muslim women's commitment to this expectation [of gender relations] as they struggle to improve African-American families marks their contribution to Black feminist tradition. In other words, the Qur'anic expectation for men poses a unique set of questions that African-American Muslim women bring to Black feminist thought: Is the male-provider role an ideal for promoting balanced responsibility between men and women in the family unit?[67]

Karim insists that because the Qur'an never addresses women in the same way it does men, demanding that men carry out their Islamic duties is what defines the parameters of feminism for Muslims.[68]

Wadud takes African-American Muslim women's commitments to feminism one step further by pointing out that on a cursory level the ideals of Islamic gender relations are in fact patriarchal systems of gender relations that do not effectively meet the needs of Muslim women seeking stability and protection, including African-American women who turn to Islam as a means of undoing American racial injustice to the African-American family. Retaining the potential to love herself through the racial lens of

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[66]Rouse, 148.

[67]Karim, "Through Sunni Women's Eyes," 28.

[68]Further, their insistence on delineating gender relations according to these Islamic sources suggests that studying women is only half of the discussion on gender the way masculinity is constructed is important as well in order to have egalitarian gender relations.

Islam, Wadud additionally creates an ethical, moral, egalitarian interpretation of Islam that empowers her as a woman in all race and class contexts, not just ones in which men are maintainers of women, since it is not the reality for many African-American Muslim women. Instead she promotes the Hajar paradigm of the household, which is both Islamic and woman-led. Karim says that "female-centered kin networks are not a viable alternative" because of the great income disparity between woman-led African-American households and those headed by married couples.[69] That suggests that perhaps preserving the male-provider role as an "accommodation of patriarchy [may be] worth the benefits that Muslim women claim, restoration of the family?"[70]

Despite that Wadud's initial draw to Islam was to elevate herself from "double oppression," she has faced many obstacles that challenge her belief that Islam preserves her dignity, such as realizing patriarchal assumptions built into the Islamic legal system regarding women's maintenance. She found that even on the level of spirituality, women have been secondary in contradiction to her understanding of Qur'anic ontology and ethics. Just as Karim notes of her informants, Wadud's continued claim to spiritual authority, which enables her to approach the Qur'an as an *'alimah* and *imamah* shows that "black women are not victims, which is a critical objective of black feminist scholarship. Rather 'a black feminist ideology presumes an image of black women as powerful, independent subjects.' As such, 'Black women are empowered with the right to interpret [their] reality and define [their] objectives."[71] Wadud's move to interpret the Qur'an as a scholar and advocate of Muslim women on all levels, including their spiritual and religious authority, is an application of her agency.

Most ethnographic studies on American Muslims focus on specific ethnic communities or study a particular theme across racial communities, making interesting observations on their interactions or similarities and differences, but very few examine race re-

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[69]Karim, "Through Sunni Women's Eyes," 28.

[70]Karim, "Through Sunni Women's Eyes," 29.

[71]Jamillah Karim, "To Be Black, Female, And Muslim: A Candid Conversation about Race in the American *Ummah*," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 26, no. 2 (August 2006): 232.

lations amongst American Muslims. Karim's work on relations between Muslim women in immigrant and African-American communities is one of the few studies that enables us to think about race within the greater American Muslim community, and begins the conversation about African-American Muslims in the context of race in America.[72] In her study comparing experiences of women of predominantly South Asian origin as the largest category of immigrant Muslims with that of African-American Muslim women, she says:

> both groups harbor racial and other forms of prejudice towards the other; however, immigrant Muslims have a level of power, authority, and privilege over African-American Muslims. This privilege is what distinguishes racism from racial prejudice [...] as people of color, South Asian and Arab immigrants do not share privilege and power with whites. To gain acceptance among whites, however, many do 'participate in antiblack racism.'[73]

This privilege includes their claims to authenticity as true Muslims, while they may be suspicious of African-American Islam as a true expression of Islam.

Within the dichotomous study of relations between Muslims of foreign origin and African Americans, a discussion on privileges enjoyed by white converts is missing. There is no discussion on white Muslim understandings of immigrant or African-American Islam, analogous to Sherman Jackson's discussion of black orientalism as a negative response to immigrant Muslim customs; perhaps this is because white American Muslims do not have the same kind of institutionalized history as the Nation of Islam serves for many African-American Muslims, and do not have their own separate communities and mosques. Because there are virtually no studies which comment extensively on race relations between immigrant Muslims and white converts and very few observations on relations between the latter group with African-American Muslims, I will be discussing the issue of Mattson's legitimacy in the eyes of the mainstream American Muslim institution, ISNA, through the juxtaposing rejection of Wadud as an

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[72]Sherman Jackson and others have discussed African-American Muslims in the context of Black-american religions as forms of resistance to racism.

[73]Karim, "To Be Black Female and Muslim," 226.

authentic Islamic voice based on her race.

In addition to professing herself as a pro-feminist from a faith perspective, a position which is considered controversial in many Muslim circles, simply being an African-American woman contributes Wadud's tense relationship with those who claim sole access to true Islam. Though her conversion to Islam was out of a deep personal connection with the words of God, and her subsequent adoption of wearing *hijab* was a personal decision based on her engaged surrender to God, these were used as signs of her authenticity by her supporters and opponents. Wadud's Qur'an-only approach, which I discussed in the context of efficacy in reform discourses in the last chapter, is also a demonstration of her knowing the Qur'anic Arabic well. Su'ad Abdul Khabeer has noted African-American Muslim women's "use of Arabic as a means of asserting authority" in the eyes of fellow African-American and other Muslims.[74] Scholarship of the Qur'an, Arabic style pronunciation, and her appearance lend some credibility to her position. However her outward appearance and scholarship has not been enough: "As a Muslim woman struggling for gender justice in Islam, I have not only been accused of working from outside Islam doing whatever I want, but also rejected as anti-Islam."[75]

Because her advocacy of egalitarianism is largely informed by her racial experience, it challenges many Muslims' notions of equality in Islam. She recalls "those who opposed my analysis boisterously hurled their opposition directly in my face, claimed certain of my comments were blasphemous, according to their interpretations of Islam, and eventually named me a 'devil in *hijab*.'"[76] No amount of training, qualifications, and adopting the surface form of legitimacy through *hijab* is sufficient in this case. Even non-Muslims question her legitimacy because she is African American, and therefore inauthentic. She recalls being asked by PBS after 9/11 to comment on the situation as an American Muslim woman, but was later turned down: "I am African American

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[74]Su'ad Abdul-Khabeer, "Black Arabic: Some Notes on African-American Muslims and the Arabic Language" in *Black routes to Islam*, ed. Manning Marable and Hishaam D. Aidi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 176.

[75]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 4-5.

[76]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 6.

[...] I was Muslim enough to be harassed, woman enough to have insights on collective female marginalization, but since I was not Middle Eastern I could not speak as either Muslim or woman [...]."[77] In casting Wadud as a black convert woman who does not know the true Islam, some Muslims and non-Muslims simultaneously deny African-American Islam as authentic, and converts and women as legitimate voices of Islam.

The narrative of Ingrid Mattson, who is a North American white convert, does not fit within dichotomous discussion of Muslims of foreign origin and African-American Muslims. Nonetheless it is important to theorize the space she occupies as a white convert and representative of American Muslims. Mattson too is a convert, wears hijab, and is a scholar of early Islamic sources, including the Qur'an. Both have spent significant time outside of the United States in majority Muslim countries, though only Wadud has had extended scholarly engagements abroad. Certainly there are many points of comparison; however, I cannot truly say, with all things being equal, the main distinguishing factor between Wadud and Mattson is race, because their trajectories and reasons for entering Islam are different, their experiences before and after transitioning to Islam are vastly different, and most importantly, as I discussed in the last chapter, they advocate pro-women reforms in Muslim communities to different extents using different approaches, even if both root themselves in Islam. Nonetheless, for lack of framework, I offer some comparative observations.

Feagin argues that classical race relations theories which treat racism and racial disparities as "temporary or gradually disappearing as a result of our advanced modernity," are insufficient tools to describe the race problem in the United States which is in his view systematic and foundational. He coins the white racial frame as "an overarching worldview, one that encompasses important racial ideas, terms, images, emotions and interpretations. For centuries now, it has been a basic and foundational frame from which a substantial majority of white Americansas well as others seeking to conform to white normsview our highly radicalized society.[78] In the white racial frame, the

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[77]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 228.

[78]Feagin, 3.

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normative American is white: "For many scholarly and popular analysts in the United States (and across the globe) the English word 'Americans is routinely, if unconsciously, used to mean white Americans. Terms like American dream and American culture are typically used to refer primarily to the values, ideals, or preferences of whites.[79] On a scholarly level we see this normative white framing of Americanization in the title of a volume by John Esposito and Yvonne Haddad Muslims on the Americanization Path? which implies the question whether Muslims in America are assimilating with normal Americans; they are not normal Americans themselves who happen to be Muslim or American Muslim. On a popular level we see the white racial framing operate in the privileging of white American converts over African American converts by American Muslims of immigrant origins which I discuss below.

If Wadud's authenticity is under scrutiny in the eyes of dominant immigrant Muslims because of being African-American, a phenomenon that other African-American women have noticed in Rouse and Karim's studies, then what can be said of attitudes towards white women converts? In recent times, there have been numerous news articles and feature stories in various American newspapers and TV news shows on CNN and Fox News about white American women converting to Islam after 9/11 in rates higher than ever before. These articles ask the question: why are these American women giving up their freedom and joining a religion which oppresses women? Though many of the articles answer the question by interviewing newly converted white women about their new beliefs which attempt to break the stereotypes of women's oppression in Islam in their conversion experiences (as do books such as *Daughters of a Another Path* and *Islam Our Choice*) the initial assumption behind the inquiry is that the women are suffering from false consciousness. Such a conversion phenomenon is not as notable amongst African-American women, but it catches media attention and Muslim attention because white women, not black women, are quintessentially American but are joining the Muslim fold. The fascination with white women's conversion to Islam as newsworthy and surprising in these articles is because of their supposed loss to the

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[79]Feagin, 7.

hands of Muslims. This is reminiscent of the racist images from the period of segregation and before, of the oversexed African-American man molesting the angelic white woman, who is a victim of uncontrollable black male sexuality; internet sites warning women from marrying Muslim men or converting to Islam carry the same kind of bigoted messages.[80]

On the flip side, Muslims welcome conversion by white women, particularly because it is the ultimate response to Western criticism of Islam as a sexist religion that even supposedly liberated white women are converting to it; it shows Islam is not oppressive. One of numerous Muslim websites featuring conversion stories of white American women called *Islam For Today* boasts: "Blonde-haired blue-eyed, former Christian, Karla, explains how her theological dissatisfaction with the doctrine of Jesus as God and her discovery of the rights given to women in Islam led her to become a Muslim."[81] The emphasis on her physical features is to highlight that she is white, and therefore it is more significant that she has found women's rights in Islam than if she belonged to another demographic. In another article on race dynamics in American Muslim communities, Karim notes that some African Americans have begun to notice immigrants privileging white converts. One African-American interlocutor notes that South Asian Muslim immigrants "believe that 'white people will be good for us,' meaning that whites will help to enhance the image of Islam in America."[82] Likewise, in addition to her qualifications, Mattson's race is an important factor in her reaching the post of ISNA president. With Mattson at the helm of ISNA, Muslims are represented by a quintessentially American figure who demonstrates to her fellow white Americans that Islam is indigenous religion and not oppressive to women. This is a privilege of voice

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[80]see Feagin, 105 for analysis on stereotypes on black criminality and Harper Lee's classical novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* for a 1960's fictional commentary on racial tensions in a segregated Alabama town where a black man was wrongly accused of raping a white woman.

[81]Islam For Today, "Karlala's Conversion to Islam," http://www.islamfortoday.com/karla.htm (accessed December 5, 2009).

[82]Jamillah Karim, "Islam for the People: Muslim Men's Voices on Race and Ethnicity in the American Ummah" in *Voices of Islam. Vol. 5, Voices of Change* ed. Vincent Cornell and Omid Safi (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2007), 55.

she enjoys on the basis of her race, over not just African-American Muslim women, but also over women from immigrant backgrounds who do not carry that exoticism on the basis of race.

Additionally Mattson's scholarly training and self defined position as "religiously conservative" and "legal modernist."[83] enables her transcend a situation that many women converts face regarding the necessity of being schooled in proper Muslim gender roles and what is true Islam. Even though her election has been seen as controversial because she is a woman, she is not dismissed on the basis of her race in the same way Amina Wadud has been attacked for not knowing true Islam on the basis of her race and the history of African-American Islam through the Nation of Islam, from which many immigrant organizations seek distance (though Wadud did not enter Islam through the Nation). Criticism of her election is more based on the fact that she is a woman, rather than her race.

Though race is not the only lens through which Wadud and Mattson approach Islam and their claims to religious authority, the context of race in America is a crucial factor in the case of both women. Wadud's experience in growing up as a black woman in the United States informs her vision of egalitarian gender and race relations in the Qur'an and her proposals for Islamic reform. An expression of this vision is acceptance of women as leaders of their households in a Hajar paradigm which is informed by African-American Muslim women's reality of not having male kin to rely on. This, along with the ability to lead prayers, is recognition of women's full spiritual authority. Mattson's mainstream acceptance is in great part because of her race. She is uniquely poised to represent American Islam because of her qualifications, color, and propensity to work with diverse Muslims to make a cohesive American Muslim community. The exegesis of these to American Muslim women are contextualized by American racial history but also have universalist claims rooted in Islamic ethics of racial and gender equality.

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[83]Abdo, 152.

Conclusions

From *'alimah* to *imamah*, the range of religious leadership roles which American Muslim women have seen as potential openings for promoting egalitarian gender relations is challenging traditional notions of male centered authority in Muslim communities as well as bringing new levels of gender consciousness to American Muslim communities. The question I ask in this thesis is how do American Muslim women make claims to religious authority–in what contexts, and using which tools, and what implications might this have on Muslim gender debates worldwide. To answer this question, throughout this thesis I have compared Amina Wadud and Ingrid Mattson's approaches to women's religious authority, their contributions to Muslim gender debates, and their visions for the future in the context of American Islam and religion in America. I highlight the context of the American religious history, race in the United States, and religious engagements with feminism as a way to situate Islam as an indigenous American religion. Mattson and Wadud's vision of women's religious authority is a product of their own negotiations with discourses on race and feminism within and outside the American Muslim community.

Putting the two women in conversation with each other demonstrates that women's claims to religious authority is an expression of their agency and produces diverse scholarship on gender discourses. Juliane Hammer has discussed how "American Muslim women scholars navigate and negotiate issues of religious and scholarly authority as well as self-identify as scholar-activists."[84] She identifies that "[i]t draws on methodological debates in religious studies on insider/outsider dynamics" as it creates a politics of who

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[84]Hammer, 444.

can speak for Muslim women taking feminist positions and who can speak authoritatively on the Qur'an."[85] Because the American academy is open to women, Mattson and Wadud as specialists of the sacred sources of Islam, have been able to define the terms of spiritual authority in Islam to include women, an accomplishment that women in few other geographical contexts can achieve given the historical exclusion of women from institutional leadership or scholarly debates.

Each woman's position on religious authority is based on the need for greater participation and representation of women in American Muslim institutions. Both Wadud and Mattson distance themselves from the terms of Western feminism because of its tainted colonial history and do not describe themselves using that term, lest it decrease the legitimacy of their voices in Muslim discourse. While recognizing the feminist movements around them, both Wadud and Mattson use only Islamic sources as their proof texts in advocating for women's increased participation in religious leadership. Mattson relies on increased gender consciousness across Muslim communities which has resulted from attacks against Islam as a misogynistic religion, in order to further her goals for women to assume leadership roles; she points to the earliest Islamic history during which women were active participants in the Prophet's new faith community. Wadud takes a textual approach to claims of leadership which is based on ethics of belief in God; ultimate belief in monotheism requires that there be no hierarchy among peoples, only a hierarchy with respect to God. Thus with men and women being equal, women's leadership, including women's *imamat* is a recognition of their full humanity.

Wadud calls for a systematic, organized movement called the gender jihad. In her view it is already underway and as

> The increased participation of women in [Islamic reform discourse] indicates a movement toward a critical mass building a variegated movement of gender empowerment, mainstreaming, and reform, including consciousness raising, increased levels of education, promotion and protection of the rights of girls and women, movements to protect and eradicate violence against women, affirmations of women's bodily integrity, policy reforms, political

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[85]Hammer, 444.

empowerment and presentation, religious authority, and personal spiritual wholeness.[86]

For Wadud, recognition of women's full spiritual authority is a necessary part of establishing egalitarian gender relations and comes in the form of women assuming roles of leadership. Her position is informed by her experience of growing up an African-American woman in the United States and transitioning into Islam as a means of elevating herself to join an egalitarian, Qur'anic model of human relations under God. She draws on the tawhidic paradigm as a proof for a woman's ability to lead as an imamah.

Mattson's election to the presidency of ISNA is a result of her scholarly qualifications, racial position, gender, and her vision for strengthening the institutional foundation of ISNA through inclusion of Muslims of diverse backgrounds and interfaith discourse. Her vision of women's religious authority is part of this vision and is based on inclusion and participation of women so that all Muslims can find an institutional home. Perhaps Mattson's approach of distancing herself from an outwardly stated intention of bringing gender reform to a popular level is pragmatic and makes her a more effective and widely accepted woman leader. Mattson's scholarship and advocacy are deeply rooted in Islamic law and methods within the Shari'a of how to reform, while Wadud's Qur'an-only approach and her calls for *ijtihad* remain theoretical given that she does not belong to an interpretive community and is therefore authoritative only in a scholarly capacity.

Writing this thesis using American religious history, racial discourses, and feminist approaches to religion, has also revealed some pitfalls. Using only the two examples of Ingrid Mattson and Amina Wadud illustration American Muslim womens construction of authority in Islam and their claims to leadership I have presented a picture which seems dichotomous: African American and White American. However, far from supporting oppositional, essentialized Muslim womens experiences, my aim has been to present these womens racial context to emphasize that American Muslim womens

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[86]Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad*, 3.

experiences are intersectional. Mattson and Wadud are not models for all American Muslim women; rather the complexities of their own experiences indicate a number of issues not limited to race relations, interactions with feminist, modernist and traditional Islamic discourses, and the context of trends in American religious history have shaped divergent understandings of womens religious authority.

Feminist or pro-women's movements outside the United States may or may not take cues from American Muslim women; however women's calls for reform of gender debates are transnational phenomena, which have in common engagement with the Islamic traditions, but are situated in their local milieus. Although Mattson and Wadud operate primarily within an American context, their claims to religious authority and visions of women's religious leadership in Islam have far-reaching consequences for Muslims everywhere who are concerned with the direction of gender relations in modernity. Even if greater sensitivity to gender issues is reactionary to Western hegemony, the shift to include women in roles of authority in textual interpretation and leadership of Muslims is also a signal of a shift in understanding of Islam as an egalitarian tradition.

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