

# THE PLATFORM

## CURRENT MUSLIM AFFAIRS



### WOMEN IN THE MUSLIM WORLD



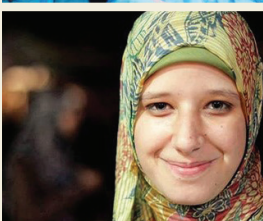
Women in the  
Muslim World  
Key Stats



Women's Rights Movement  
in Muslim Societies

A Woman in the Director's  
Chair: Aida Begić

Interviews  
Hatice Çolak & Lauren Booth



Book Review  
Do Muslim Women  
Need Saving?

Research Centre for Social Thought and Policy (TODAM) aims to investigate the problems faced by Muslim societies, in particular Türkiye, including their nature, interconnectivity, and suggest concrete solutions to these problems by combining the experiences from the Turkish society and the Muslim world. With its diverse range of research and publication studies TODAM aims to address the leading problems of Türkiye and Muslim societies such as unemployment, income inequality, brain drain, asylum seekers, urbanization, human rights violations, domestic violence, pension system and housing, and offer solutions to them in the light of quantitative data.

TODAM offers statistical data related to studies conducted in the fields of law, education, economy, and social work, especially in Türkiye and Muslim societies after year 2000, through its database where researchers can compare, combine, and extract different statistical information. It functions as a centre that provides the space and opportunity to conduct independent academic studies by making quantitative data accessible.

## PLATFORM

Platform magazine is published within the body of TODAM of the İLKE Foundation for Science, Culture and Education (TODAM) in an attempt to provide up-to-date and original perspectives on the intellectual, political, social, economic and cultural agendas of Muslim societies. Platform is an output of the Thought and Movements in Muslim Societies Project.

It aims to be a platform where the affairs of the Muslim world are followed and analysed through the activities of influential think tanks, research centres and institutes, universities, political, religious, and social movements. The Muslim world's contributions to global issues and the ongoing intellectual accumulation are presented to Turkey and the world through Platform magazine. It keeps its finger on the pulse of the Muslim world through its website and its database of current institutions, movements, activities, and personalities.

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# Editorial

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The Platform magazine, which focuses on the agenda of Muslim societies thematically using a data-based approach, offers up-to-date and authentic perspectives on the issues of the Muslim world penned by experts of the relevant fields.

The place and position of women in society is a prominent issue today. However, to approach this issue with stereotype thinking often leads to ignorance about the historical and contemporary importance of women in Muslim societies. With this realisation, we decided “Women in Muslim societies” as the theme for our 26<sup>th</sup> issue. We have tried to put forward a perspective that examines the literature on Islamic feminism and reviews the women movements in Muslim societies. We have also included the stories of Muslim women who are pioneers and influential in various fields from cinema to business, and from academia to human rights advocacy.

This issue includes an interview with Hatice olak, the Director of Assalam Association, in which we talked about African women and Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hasan. In addition, in an interview with British journalist and activist Lauren Booth, who reverted to Islam in 2010, we talked about the role of Muslim women in the public sphere and their skewed representation in today’s media.

In this issue’s infographic, we demonstrate the data on women participation in socio-political and economic life, education, and employment in the Muslim world. This issue also includes a review of *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?*, an influential book written by anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod. In the portrait section, we feature acclaimed Bosnian director Aida Begic, whose films focus on the stories of children and women.

We hope that the 26th issue of the Platform will be beneficial to its readers, and Muslim women will take a leading role in making this world a more just, prosperous, and equitable place to live.

Büşra İnce & Selvanur Demircan

# THEME: WOMEN IN THE MUSLIM WORLD



6

## Women's Rights Movements in Muslim Societies

Ayşe Güç

## What is Islamic Feminism and who is a Muslim Feminist?

Zeynep Tekdoğan



11



17

## A Woman in the Director's Chair: Aida Begic

Remziye Betül Ellialtıoğlu

## Exploring the Diverse Female Faces of the Muslim World



20



28

## Women of Africa: An Interview with Hatice Çolak, Head of Assalam Association

## Being a Muslim Woman in Academia

Zeyneb Hafsa Orhan



33

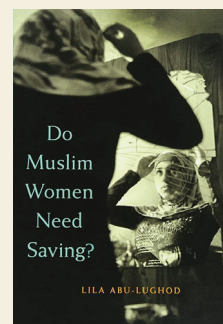


37

## Interview with Journalist- Activist Lauren Booth

## Book Review: Do Muslim Women Need Saving?

Sevil Kaysı

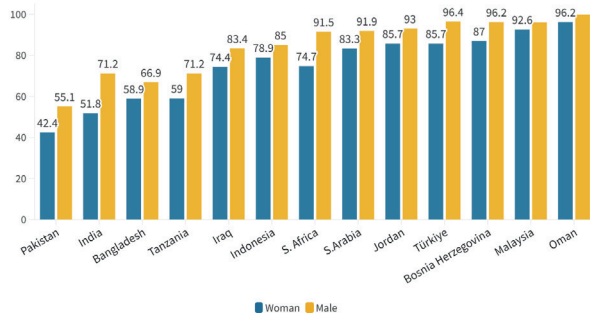


40

# WOMEN IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

## KEY STATS

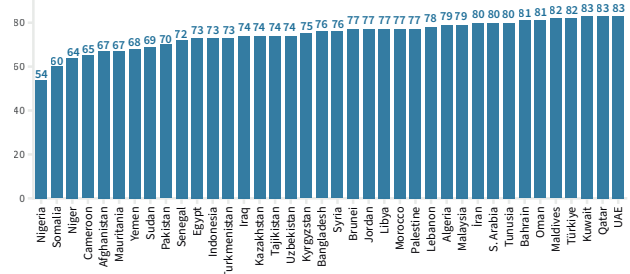
### » Primary Education Graduate Male and Female



Malaysia and Oman are the countries where the gap between men and women with primary education is the smallest. In these countries, women empowerment policies seem to have yielded positive results.

Source: SESRIC

### » Average Life Expectancy of Women by Country



The fact that women in the Gulf region have the highest life expectancy in Muslim countries reveals the positive relationship between life expectancy and economic development.

Source: SESRIC

United Arab Emirates	Federal National Council	50
Uzbekistan	Legislative Council	33.57
Iraq	Iraqi Council of Representatives	28.88
Sudan	National Assembly	27.65
Egypt	House of Representatives	27.53
Tajikistan	House of Representatives	26.98
Morocco	House of Representatives	24.3
Israel	House of Representatives	24.17
Tunisia	House of Representatives	21.57
Indonesia	Parliament	21.57
Bangladesh	Assembly of People's	20.8
Pakistan	House of Representatives	20.47
Mauritania	National Assembly	20.26
Bahrain	National Assembly	20
Kyrgyzstan	National Assembly	20

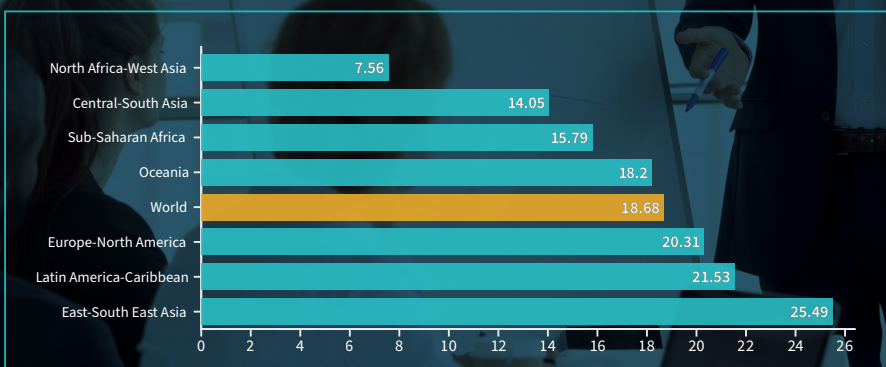
Saudi Arabia	Shura Council	19.87
Kazakhstan	House of Representatives	18.37
Libya	House of Representatives	16.47
India	National People's Assembly	15.13
Malaysia	House of Representatives	13.51
Jordan	House of Representatives	12.31
Syrian Arab Republic	People's Assembly	10.8
Brunei Darussalam	Legislative Council	8.82
Algeria	National People's Assembly	7.86
Lebanon	National Assembly	6.25
Iran	Islamic Parliament of Iran	5.59
Qatar	Shura Council	4.44
Oman	Shura Council	2.33
Kuwait	National Assembly	0
Yemen	House of Representatives	0

Table: Women in Assemblies (2022, %)

Source: Parline database on national parliaments (<https://data.ipu.org>).

In contrast to employment and education rates, the MENA region has a high proportion of women in national parliaments. In addition to women's presence in the political arena, the extent of their influence is also an important issue. However, this picture offers remarkable developments for the MENA region.

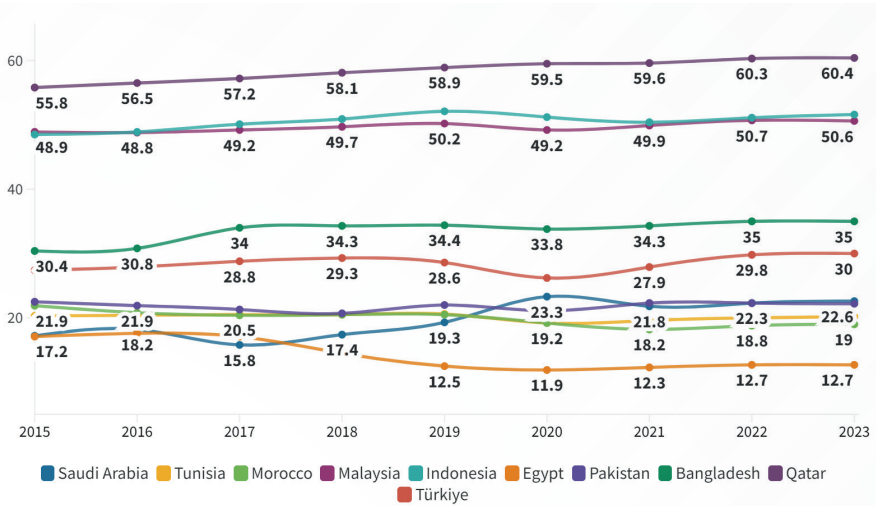
### » Women in Executive Positions by Region



In Muslim-majority regions, women in managerial positions remain below the world average. There is a 17 percentage points difference between the probability of women to be at Managerial positions in East-Southeast, a region which has the highest rate, and North Africa-West that has the lowest percentage of women at managerial roles.

Source: United Nations, <https://bit.ly/3A9CGaK>

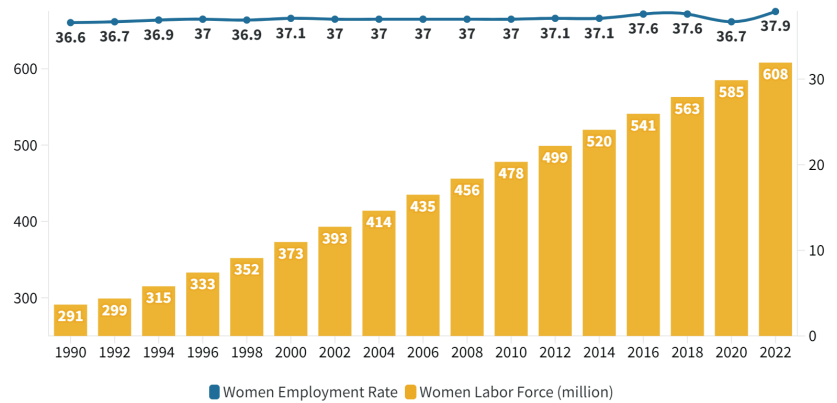
## Employment Rate of Women (by Country)



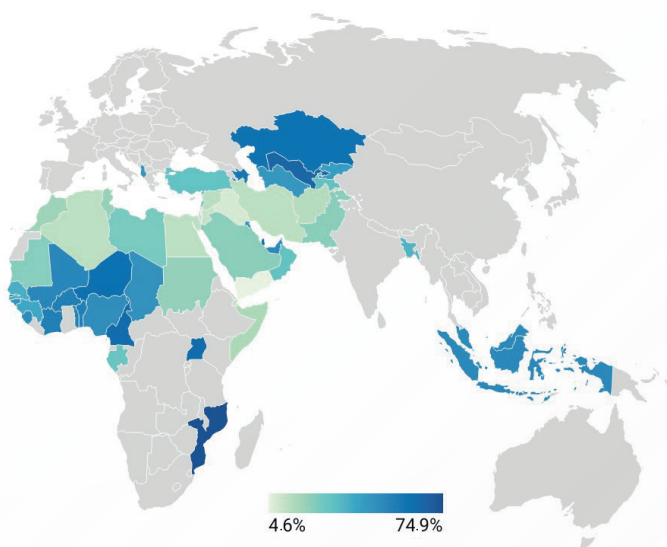
As a result of state policies and social efforts that prioritize women's participation in socio-political life in Southeast Asia, Indonesia and Malaysia have high rates of women in employment. While it can be observed that the employment of women in Muslim societies is showing an increasing trend, Egypt, which is still ruled by military dictatorship, has seen a decline.

## Average Female Labour Force and Female Employment Rates in OIC Member Countries

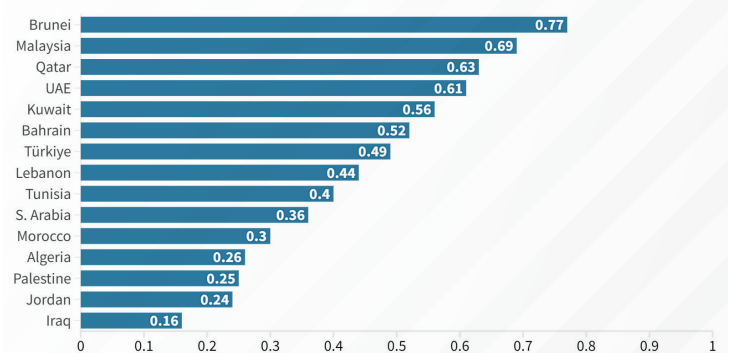
While there is an increase in the female populations of countries that are members of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, a similar increase has not been recorded in the percentage of women employment in those countries. Yet, the fact that women participation in employment has stayed constant and has not declined could be considered a success.



## Female employment rates in OIC member countries 2022



## Gender equality in labour force participation by country (1.0 means that full equality is achieved)



Women and men are more likely to actively participate in the labour force and have the same opportunities in Muslim countries with large economies, while inequality increases as the economic level declines. The lack of adequate job opportunities and the lack of space for women in socio-political life are just some of the main reasons for this inequality.

# Women's Rights Movements in Muslim Societies



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<http://dx.doi.org/10.26414/pmdg10>

One of the main problems with women studies is to not separate feminist theory from the women movements. In many Muslim countries, these studies have been influenced by feminist theories developed in the West but are shaped around domestic issues. Women movements can interact with national political movements. It can also be said that women movements albeit diverse in their worldviews yet are interconnected in their functioning. In the case of Muslim societies, these issues become more ambiguous. Importantly, what kind of differentiation Muslim women movements, which are fed by Western feminist theories, make within themselves. Women movements in Muslim societies can generally be divided into secular and religious, but it is worth remembering that not all women movements develop on the same track due to the unique issues of each country.

This article will provide an overview of women movements in the Muslim societies. This evaluation will emphasize the importance of country and regional differences. Each country's own historical adventure and internal dynamics are reflected in its women movements. Accordingly, there are some differences between colonized and non-colonized countries, as well as between Middle Eastern countries and Asian or African countries. While women movements in the Middle East emerged at an earlier stage, the characteristics of women movements in countries with colonial experience are more prominent and representative.

It should be noted that there are mainly two trends in women's movements of the Muslim societies: Secular and, religious or Islamist women's movements. According to Margot Badran (2013), it is not possible to entirely separate these two women's movements, as there are points of intersection between them. With this in mind, we can say that the characteristics of women's movements are determined by the internal dynamics and political struggles of the countries in which they develop. However, when some countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa are taken into account, the impact of the colonial experience on the emergence of women's movements also becomes evident.

The fittingness of feminist critique in Muslim societies is debatable. Therefore, the ongoing feminist theoretical debates and women activism in Muslim societies sometimes do not coincide. The secular



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politics of countries can also be influential due to this distinction. Accordingly, the points of intersection vary between countries. While countries such as Malaysia, Indonesia and Iran are similar in some points, there are significant differences between them when they are evaluated together.

Malaysia and Indonesia can be considered countries where the feminist movement and intellectual development are mutually supportive, given their former colonial experiences and different cultural and historical backgrounds (Martyn, 2004). In

these countries, it is possible to see the effects of theoretical debates on politics and society. On the other hand, Iran is one of the most striking countries with its unique conditions and political experience. The women’s movement in Iran is one of the most emphasized examples since it is associated with the Iranian Revolution. The experience here differs from the other two countries because there is more political counter-positioning. Women have developed a political stance against the compulsory hijab and certain other laws.



Protests against the headscarf ban at universities in Belgium, 5 July 2020

*Women had a leading role in the Iranian Revolution.*



Women's movements evolved in closer connection with nationalist movements in nations without a colonial past, like Türkiye. Women's movements have evolved since the 1980s as religious women have grown increasingly active in society, while initially having a secular-leaning. In this period, the efforts of socialist women who criticized Kemalist feminism stand out. Although there are similarities between these women movements and the women movements that emerged in the last years of the Ottoman Empire, it is difficult to see them as a continuation of each other. Nevertheless, the Ottoman women movement is an important example to see the correlation between women movements and women's magazines. Many women movements that developed in the 1980s displayed this tendency. An example of this is the Zanan magazine in Iran.

Colonial struggles had important consequences for the women movements. The removal of the veil by well-known female figures in Egypt is regarded as the start of the emergence of women movements there. However, in the Algerian case, wearing the veil as a counter-movement was reconstructed as a symbol of freedom. Fanon called the anti-colonial stance of the Algerian women movement that had a national tendency as well, a "veil war". On the other hand, in Türkiye, which is striving to become a nation-state, wearing the headscarf was considered a counter-movement. The "Hand in Hand Protest" in

1998, which was a turning moment for Muslim women's civil rights in Türkiye, and other civil initiatives contributed to create a discourse on rights that was distinct from that of the other two nations. As can be seen, historical experiences as well as domestic developments determine the characteristics of women movements.

Given the popular uprisings in Egypt, Indonesia, Tunisia, Malaysia and Morocco, they can be assumed to be more stable in terms of women's movements. In these five countries, women's movements developed as counter-movements against an Islamic perspective (Derichs, & Fennert, 2014). However, political liberalization processes have not worked in favour of women. The tension between gender equality and gender rights discourses still persists.

When the experiences of Muslim societies are taken into account, it is seen that there are parallels and variances. The prominent countries in the debates are Iran, Algeria, Egypt and Malaysia, where Western countries pay special attention and where rich debates can be held. Türkiye is partially involved in these debates. Religiously oriented women's movements in Türkiye are not sufficiently organized. For a long time, the women's movement, which has been associated with the headscarf issue, does not provide an adequate representation. Compared to many other countries, this movement seems disorganized and far from theoretical orientation. Again,



it can be said that there is not enough consensus between this movement and secular women movements.

Different experiences are noteworthy in the positioning of women movements regarding the hijab. In the anti-colonial movements in Algeria, women developed a resistance by wearing the veil. In this case, the veil was separated from a traditional dress code and turned into an instrument of opposition in the new political sphere (Yeğenoğlu, 1998). On the other hand, in the Iranian experience, it appeared as a symbol of women's withdrawal of support for a political movement. In Türkiye, on contrary, wearing the headscarf has become an object of religious individuals' efforts to assert themselves in public life. These instances serve as a reminder of the importance of assessing each nation while taking into account its unique conditions.

The visibility of the female body has evolved into a contentious

***Given the popular uprisings in Egypt, Indonesia, Tunisia, Malaysia and Morocco, they can be assumed to be more stable in terms of women's movements. In these five countries, women's movements developed as counter-movements against an Islamic perspective.***

topic, which is something that all women movements have in common. Although there are different views regarding the objectification of the female body, it can be said that all discussions are basically united on the women's position in the society. Although the emphases in the discourse on rights converge at some points, in general they vary according to the experiences of the countries in question. It should be noted that these emphases have shifted in different directions with the participation of Western actors. In recent years, campaigns such as "stop FGM" have been effective with the joint efforts of national women's movements and international civil organizations. FGM is a regional practice, but it has fuelled debates across the Muslim world about the domination of Muslim women over their bodies.

In terms of the four waves of Western feminist discourse, the first wave of feminism influenced the Ottoman and Egyptian women movements, but women



Women Protesting in Egypt

movements in Muslim societies gained momentum with the second wave of feminism. Over time, women movements in the Middle East influenced women movements in Muslim societies of Africa and Asia (Moghadam, 2001; Mohamad & Ng, 2006). The second period was marked by movements in post-colonial countries and the women's movement in Iran. In the third wave of feminism debates, Islamist feminist discourse became more prominent. The fourth wave of feminism continues to be shaped by social media on the harassment and abuse of the female body. This last wave may become an example of the transnational articulation of women's movements in different countries. This process may further affect the fragmented nature of women's movements in Muslim societies. On the other hand, women who live in Western countries but were born in a Muslim country or have cultural ties with a Muslim country, as well as those who have converted to Islam, are participating in the debates, creating a richer and more diverse picture that is more difficult to analyse.

In conclusion, it can be said that there has been a growing interest in the rights of Muslim, but the discussions have not sufficiently emphasized national and regional differences. This makes it difficult to analyse women's movements as social phenomena developing in separate contexts. Due to the perception that liberal feminist movements restrict the rights

of Muslim women to some limited domains i.e. the demand for rights such as voting, education, and participation in society, the disposition of Muslim women's rights movements becomes ambiguous. However, alternative debate points may emerge in various nations, sometimes requiring intellectual output and engagement in society, other times requiring the reading of religious texts from a woman-sensitive perspective.

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# What is Islamic Feminism and who is a Muslim Feminist?



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<http://dx.doi.org/10.26414/pmdg11>

Against a background of debates and opposition to the juxtaposition of the concepts of Islam and feminism, Islamic feminism tries to explain itself from a different perspective. At the same time, the concept of Islamic feminism contains many dilemmas that have not been fully clarified in the literature (Tohidi, 2004, p. 282). Although there are those who reject this idea because it constitutes an orientalist perspective, Islamic feminism became visible in the 1990s (Bora, 2008, p. 65). Muslim women, who are defined by their religion through this idea, led by educated conservative women, have tried to demonstrate their feminist stance through Islam as well as for Islam (Ali, 2019, p. 16). While some of these women do not hesitate to identify themselves as Muslim feminists, they are hesitant to use the term Islamic feminism, which has been adopted as an ideology. While writers such as Egyptian Nawwal al-Saadawi and Moroccan Fatima Mernissi write on Islamic feminism and support studies in this field, they refrain from defining themselves as “Islamic feminists”. On the contrary, writers such as Magrod Badron state that every woman who lives in a Muslim country and identifies herself as Muslim actually contributes to Islamic feminism and works to produce this discourse (Güç, 2008, p. 656).

## Feminism and Islam

Although the idea of Islamic feminism was introduced as a term in the 1990s, many Muslim feminist women trace their rejection of male domination in the Muslim society back to the emergence of Islam (Ali, 2019, p. 17). At the same time, there is a consensus that feminism did not appear before or after feminist thought, but rather around the same time (Ali, 2019, p. 19). Islamic feminists agree that Islamic sources should be read by women and reinterpreted in favour of women. Women desire a system that allows them to advance in their national, ethnic, and cultural identities without ignoring them at the same time, and they do not want to compromise their religious sensitivities (Tohidi, 2004, p. 280).

For women living in a Muslim country, embracing feminism was in part a response to the traditional patriarchal ideas of a religious authority, and Muslim feminists sought to reform these traditional elements. At the same time, in response to the perception of modernity and secularism proposed by feminism, these women have endeavoured to

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hold fast unto religion in their lives. As a result of all this, it is possible to state the following: Muslim feminists are struggling internally with the traditional patriarchal order and externally with the dilemmas of modern ideas and seeking a religion-based answer (Tohidi, 2004, p. 285).

The notion of feminism is not a monolithically precise phenomenon that carries certain widely held presumptions. It is possible to categorize it differently according to its extent. For example, some feminists believe in the basic teachings of the Qur’an and reject issues such as polygamy and inheritance as ancient Arab traditions. On the other hand, some Islamic feminists, while accepting the teachings of the Qur’an to the latter, argue that the Qur’an appears to draw strong boundaries for women because it is interpreted with a male monopoly and that it should be reinterpreted in favour of women.

(Gürhan, 2011, p. 114) The pioneer of this has been the Sisters in Islam (SIS) group operating in Malaysia. Along with the groups that prioritize feminism and work for the reinterpretation of the Qur’an in favour of women, the idea that the main factor in the occurrence of violence against women is not the main source of Islam but traditional teachings has become more accepted. Many Islamic feminists who advocate this view have developed themselves in the field of Qur’anic exegesis and hadith and produced contemporary methods (Güç, 2008, p. 659). Islamic feminists can be divided into three main groups: traditional reformists, who accept that Islam grants women and men “equal” rights and duties and even if not equal, exalts their status in granting them pivotal family positions like mother, sister and wife; radical reformists, who, while accept the need to stick to primary religious sources, question their



Malaysia Sisters in Islam (SIS)

patriarchal interpretations about women's roles in society; liberal feminists who, despite identifying themselves as Muslims and adhering to the Qur'an and Sunnah, argue that the Qur'an does not require jurisprudence and should be evaluated subjectively and that patriarchal discourses should be evaluated in the traditional context (Ali, 2019, p. 31).

## Islamic Feminism in the Muslim World

While there are many interpretations of the term Islamic feminism, it is difficult to conduct a detailed analysis of women's thoughts on Islamic feminism and their participation rates in the Middle East. In addition, there are debates on whether women's reactions to problems within a country or their struggles for their rights and freedoms could also be seen as feminist actions. However, it is also possible to say that feminist movements are ideas that emerged after women's movements (Ertan and Dikme, 2016, p. 80).

The concept of Islamic feminism was first used in Iran by Iranians, Afsaneh Najmabadeh and Ziba Mir-Hosseini in the magazine *Zanan*, founded by Shahla Sherkat; while in Türkiye, it appeared in Nilüfer Göle's book *Modern Mahrem* in 1991. In Arabia in 1996, it was mentioned by Mai Yamani in her book *Feminism and Islam*, and again in the 1990s, African activist Shamima Shaikh used the term "Islamic feminist" (Ali, 2019, p. 40).

Women engaged in Islamic feminist work have mostly coalesced around the Iranian magazine *Zanan* and *Sister in Islam (SIS)*, which is very active in Malaysia. Founded in Malaysia in the late 1980s by Zainah Anwar, SIS has been active in the reinterpretation of the Qur'an and Hadith. The Iranian journals *Payam-e Hajar*, *Zanan* and *Farzaneh: Journal of Women's Studies and Research* have contributed greatly to the expansion of Islamic feminist discourses. By 2000, the magazine *Swara Rahima*, published by the Rahime Foundation in Indonesia, the feminist movement led by Esmā al-Murābit in Morocco, the Iraqi Islamist Feminist Movement in Iraq, the New Women's Foundation, the Arab Women's Solidarity Foundation, and many other organizations and

movements had taken on the role of the continuity of Islamic feminism (Gürhan, 2010, p. 372).

In order to define the arguments for Islamic feminism, figures such as Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan or Fatima Naseef have focused on the Qur'an and its different *tasfseers*. Similarly, Shaheen Sardar Ali from Pakistan and Aziza Al-Hibri from Lebanon compare their understanding of the Qur'an with different Sharia practices. Fatima Mennisi from Morocco and Turkish writer Hidayet Tuksal try to reinterpret hadiths (Ali, 2019, p. 45). In addition to these, Kasım Emin's *Tahrir'ül- Mer'e* in Egypt in 1990 paved the way for the emergence of the idea of feminism in Muslim countries and set an example for later works. This Islamic feminism that emerged in Egypt has three main features. First, it is a Qur'an-based approach; second, it sharpens the line between East and West by giving importance to Islamic traditions and culture; and finally, it considers the family as a social institution. Although there are some exceptions, Islamic feminist thinkers in Egypt have not been much influenced by Western ideologies; they have continued on their journey in different ways, with more traditional and cultural acceptances (Güç, 2008, p. 660).

## Islamic Feminism in Iran

In Iran, the 1979 Islamic revolution unexpectedly created a relationship between Islamic law and feminism. In such an environment, women who lead a religious life but opposed the presuppositions of traditional beliefs were provided with an opportunity to claim their rights and "Islamic feminism" emerged as a solution (Ali, 2019, p. 107). However, Islamic feminism in Iran has not been an idea that blends its own traditional elements as in Egypt. On the contrary, it has been highly influenced by secular feminist ideas from the West. Afsaneh Najmabadi, who coined the term Islamic feminism in Iran - and around the world - in a speech in 1994, considered Islamic feminism as a movement that made dialogue with secular feminism in the West possible. Many women writers working for *Zanan* magazine<sup>1</sup> also recognized that they shared common grounds with feminists who espouse secular ideas (Güç, 2008, p.661).

1 The magazine was shut down by the Iranian state in 2008.

The Zanan magazine banned in Iran.



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It is known that Shirin Ebadi, an Iranian judge who considers herself as a religious and culturally devoted individual, has been in a great dilemma after the rights she lost with the revolution and has stood against the mandatory wearing of headscarf restriction, stating that the revolution was the murderer of her daughters (Ebadi, 2008). In addition, in an interview in 1999, Ebadi put forward the general understanding of Islamic feminism in Iran as follows (Tohidi, 2004, p. 282):

If Islamic feminism means that a Muslim woman can also be a feminist and that feminism and Islam are not irreconcilable, I agree with it. However, if this implies that feminism in Muslim communities is somehow unique and fundamentally distinct from feminisms in other societies, then I disagree with the idea that it must always be Islamic.

The existence of such examples is quite common among Iranian feminist thinkers. Taking these into account, some authors emphasize that although Iranian and Western feminists oppose Eurocentric approaches, many of their discourses follow an orientalist approach (Güç, 2008, p. 665).

On the contrary, pro-revolutionary women such as Jamile Kadivar, a proponent of Islamic feminism in Iran, emphasized that Khomeini’s revelations on the women’s issue were not fully understood, stating that the revolution transformed women from being a commodity and an object into their own identity and freed them from the “wrong understanding of freedom”. Thus, according to Kadivar, Islamic feminist understanding can only be achieved by being fully committed to traditions and Islam and reading the sources properly with an Islamic understanding (Kadivar, 2014, p. 63).

## **Alternative Perspectives on Feminism**

Many feminist thinkers underline that religions are fundamentally a part of patriarchal discourse and that it is quite wrong for women to express their feminine discourse within a religious framework and that it is an acceptance of male dominance hence “a battle lost from the beginning”. They also criticize the work of civil society organizations such as Sisters in Islam, the most important actor of





**While Islamic feminists living in places with large Muslim populations are expanding their activities, it is noteworthy that there is almost no participation in such activities in Türkiye.**



Islamic feminist work in Malaysia. In contrast, Malaysian writer Zainah Anwar underlines that activists working in this field have been working seriously for a long time and have been struggling against the traditional norms. Underlining the emancipation of women through organizations such as Sisters in Islam established in Malaysia, Anwar underlined that these movements are actually based on an Islamic foundation, saying, “We are rediscovering Islam for ourselves, which raised our status by giving us rights that were revolutionary for us 1400 years ago” (Ali, 2019, p. 131).

While Islamic feminists living in places with large Muslim populations are expanding their activities, it is noteworthy that there is almost no participation in such activities in Türkiye. The lack of major structured organizations in Türkiye has affected the continuity of the idea of Islamic feminism. In addition to names such as Cihan Aktaş, Sibel Eraslan, Nazife Şişman, Yıldız Ramazanoğlu, Hidayet Şefkatli and Mualla Gülnaz, who have distanced themselves from the concept of Islamic feminism, have contributed to studies on Islamic feminism and Muslim feminists in Türkiye. In addition to this, it can be said that women who pursue feminism movements along Islamic lines and women who follow a secular line in Türkiye do not act together hence do not form a collective movement. The claims of secular feminists that women who choose to wear the headscarf are serving patriarchy are refuted by these women with the argument that the cover with themselves with their free will and to abide by their religion. The bipolar understanding of feminism in Türkiye has turned into a political discourse as well (Altıparmak and Budak, 2020, p.34).

## Conclusion

The idea of Islamic feminism, which emerged as a result of Muslim women’s attempts to gain their

individual identity, remains to be a growing ideology worldwide. It brings along problems in many areas such as the reinterpretation of Qur’an prioritizing women, the classification of unauthentic hadiths, and the rejection of traditional assumptions, especially the debate on whether it is an extension of Western-based feminism. This idea, which has expanded its sphere of influence in many countries, especially in Iran, has found different responses depending on the country. Islamic feminism, the foundations of which were established with the Zanan magazine, is now moving towards being replaced by more secular initiatives in Iran. The recent Mahsa Amini protests in Iran can also be considered a secular movement. In addition to all of these, it is not possible to make precise analyses about the prevalence of Islamic feminism in the Middle East. It would be better to view these judgments via a perspective of women’s movements and to interpret them in light of their various facets.

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# A Woman in the Director's Chair: Aida Begic



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Unfortunately, there are very few women film directors today. In order to become a female film director and make your own film, you need to find someone who believes in your project and then you have to work hard to make it the way you want it to be, and here you can be sure that unimaginably difficult paths await you to prove yourself as a woman. In an interview with Aida Begic, she says the following about this subject:

It's not easy being a woman director. You have to be twice as good as your male colleagues to get equal treatment. Being a covered Muslim filmmaker is even more complicated. But we should not give up.<sup>1</sup>

Aida Begic is actually a very special example for all Muslim women who have career ambitions in the cinema industry. In addition, as a woman with gloomy memories of the Bosnian War who tried to heal her wounds through art, Begiç is a personality that many people get inspiration from.

Aida Begic is a Bosnian woman director. She has a total of 6 feature films, including two award-winning films from Cannes. She has also contributed to other films as a writer and director. Begiç graduated from the Academy of Performing Arts at the University of Sarajevo and made two short films before her feature films. Her films are dominated by the traces of the geography she lives in and the texture of the culture she grew up in. Begiç is one of the people who witnessed the Bosnian War and tried to overcome the trauma of the war through art. As a victim of the Bosnian War herself, Begiç witnessed how war can cause great suffering, and with the effect of this, she built her artistic codes more on war. Her first feature film *Snijeg (Snow)*, followed by *Djeca (Children)* and *Don't Leave Me* are stories about the lives of people left behind after the war. *Snijeg* tells the story of women trying to make a living as a result of the massacre of the men in their families. *Djeca*, on the other hand, tells the story of a sister and her brother, orphaned in the war, and their struggle to hold on to life and the difficulties they face. The film *Don't Leave Me* is a project film that aims to raise awareness about understanding refugees. This film also tells the story of children who have suffered losses after the incidents in Syria.

1 Appointment | Aida Begic, TRT 2, 2019, <https://bit.ly/41uDe6K>



Aida Begic broke her story structure, which was greatly affected by the war and always built on the war, with the film *A Ballad*. *A Ballad* tells the life story of Meri, who returns to her family home with her child after a 10-year marriage. However, all her films except *A Ballad* are intertwined with the theme of war. In general, the main reason why Aida Begic builds her story codes on the war can be seen as the long-lasting effects of the war. For this reason, the traces of the war have lasted for a long time in Begic's art. Begic even says the following words about this:

During the siege of Sarajevo, I learnt how important art is. I learnt that you need art even when you have no food, electricity, water, or clothes. Because art makes you feel like a human being under all circumstances and gives you back your respectability.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, what makes Begic different is not only the fact that she is a victim of war. In fact, she also stands out as a rare Muslim woman director who has established a unique cinematic language of her own. Her cinema language is not shaped by a political

approach, but by common human experiences. Of course, the viewer can see the political side of the work as she reads the details about the traces of the wars Begic narrates, but Aida Begic instead of narrating in a plane manner brings all dimensions into discussion. Perhaps it can be said that there is a hidden politicization in her films, which sits on a rational ground. This is quite valuable because the director does not convey what she wants to say in an unprocessed, primitive emotional form. Instead, she has trained herself enough to be able to tell the emotion and reality through the layered structure of the story by having a good story-building skill.

Being a woman director means looking at the story from a woman's point of view. Aida Begic is a director who does this especially by constructing female characters and including their stories. In Aida Begic's films, we see that women as the main characters are in a constant struggle to survive. Anyone who watches the films has the opportunity to look at the experiences of women through the eyes of women.

<sup>2</sup> Appointment | Aida Begic.



It should also be pointed out that the female characters in Begić's films deal with the difficulties they experience as a woman and not as masculine reflections of females as shown in many films.

In this respect, it can be said that the characters written by Begic are very well constructed in terms of not giving up being a woman both in appearance and behaviour. Although women sometimes take on a harsh profile, they always remain as a female character. They may turn into angry women, but this does not bring them to the same point as a male character's anger. Begić's stories generally consist of stories in which characters who try to ensure constructiveness and make the story sustainable try to solve problems by repairing things without destroying them.

The fact that the main character in a film is a woman does not always mean that the story is

dominated by the female point of view. If a story is to be told from a woman's point of view in a film, the relationship in which the viewer is a man and the viewed is a woman should be put aside. Only then can the woman become a subject in her own right and construct her own story instead of being an auxiliary object in the man's story that helps him realize something. Women's point of view does not only mean telling the story of women. A woman's point of view means approaching the story from a place that allows us to look at events from a woman's point of view and to capture emotions from a woman's perspective. For example, a detail that is not noteworthy for a man can be a detail that a woman can build her story around. The fact that Aida Begic manages to escape from this male gaze and captures the female gaze while telling a story is very valuable in this respect. In Begic's films,

**“ Being a woman director means looking at the story from a woman's point of view. Aida Begic is a director who does this especially by constructing female characters and including their stories. ”**

female characters exist on their own and become the subjects of events.

It should also be noted that Aida Begić's cinema language is shaped not only from the perspective of common women but rather a woman who is Muslim in her belief. The fact that Begić tells the story of orphans based on the issue of protecting orphans' rights in Islam can also be considered as an important point. In addition, in terms of the aesthetics of the language she uses, the fact that the scenes that can be called the climax of Begić are composed of religious motifs is also very valuable in this respect. For example, the scene where Alma performs ablution and the parts where they stand in prayer with the congregation are one of the aesthetic climaxes in the film *Snijeg*. In other words, Aida Begić not only tells stories in which the viewer is a woman, but also creates a narrative through the aesthetic perspective of a Muslim woman. Begić also includes metaphysical details in her films. For example, in the film *Snijeg*, Ali's hair grow in a terrifying way every time he is scared. In this part of the story, there is an immaterial state that cannot be explained by the material dimension. Aida Begić does not attempt to explain or conclude the events only in the material dimension and mostly leaves the interpretation to the audience. This actually means that the audience is given the opportunity to think about the story and it is also very important for the connection between the story and the audience.

As we mentioned at the beginning of the article, unfortunately, the number of female directors is quite less, and even lesser is the number of Muslim female directors. In the world of cinema, where there are few Muslim women directors, Aida Begić is a valuable name who stands out with the recognition she deserves and her aesthetically elegant approach to storytelling. As a woman and a female Muslim filmmaker, she says that we need to work harder than others to get somewhere. Nowadays, Begić and many other determined women filmmakers like her are giving hope to many young women filmmakers and showing us that it is possible for Muslim women filmmakers to get recognised by telling real stories from a woman's point of view without resorting to propaganda. Aida Begić is a valuable name that everyone, young and old, can be inspired by.

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***It should also be noted that Aida Begić's cinema language is shaped not only from the perspective of common women but rather a woman who is Muslim in her belief.***

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**Exploring  
the Diverse  
Female Faces  
of the Muslim  
World**

## Activism - Human Rights



Ahed Tamimi

*“In my opinion, international human rights and international women’s rights organizations are not doing enough for Palestinian women who are murdered and oppressed by the occupation.”*

Ahed Tamimi, a recent symbol of Palestinian resistance, lives in Ramallah in the West Bank. In 2011, at the age of 11, she became known for her stance against Israeli soldiers’ attacks on her family members. After this incident, she became known as “the brave girl of Palestine”. On 19 December 2017, she was detained for eight months. In the interview she gave at the time of her release from prison after spending eight months behind bars, she drew attention to the difficulties faced by Palestinian women imprisoned in Israeli prisons. Tamimi, who has been the voice of Palestinian women since that day, states that international human rights and women’s organizations that defend women’s rights ignore Palestinian women. She points out that even the smallest pressure on the occupying and colonialist Israel by the international community is of great importance for Palestinians.



Asmaa Mohamed El-Beltagy

Asmaa el-Beltagy, the symbol of the Egyptian resistance, was martyred on 14 August 2013, at the age of 17, in Rabiätü’l Adeviyye Square in Cairo by the putschist soldiers. When she was martyred, Esmaa, who was studying science in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of high school, was aiming to become a doctor. When she was martyred, Esmaa was running to help those who were injured as a result of the direct fire of the Sisi’s security forces on civilians in the square. Mohamed el-Beltagy, the father of the martyred Esmaa, is also imprisoned in Egypt with a death sentence and a 300-year sentence. el-Beltagy, who was informed of his daughter’s martyrdom in prison and was prevented from attending her funeral, said goodbye to his daughter with the following words:

*I’m not saying goodbye to you, but I’ll see you soon. You lived with your head held high, rebelling against tyranny. You rejected all obstacles and fell in love with freedom without limits. You were quietly looking for new horizons to resurrect and build this Ummah so that it could take its rightful place in civilisation.*



Gülden Sönmez, one of the most prominent activists in Türkiye, stands out as a woman dedicated to the defense of human rights. A lawyer by profession, Sönmez has participated in many civil society activities since the 1990s, writing reports and taking part in national and international rights defense initiatives. In 2009, she took part in the coordination of the humanitarian aid convoy formed to break the embargo on Gaza. She was one of the passengers on the Mavi Marmara ship where 10 people were killed. She mobilized the Convoy of Conscience to defend the rights of oppressed women in the Syrian war and to draw the world's attention. This convoy, which was attended by thousands of people, went to the Syrian border and tried to draw the attention of the world public opinion to the women being tortured in Syrian dungeons. Gülden Sönmez, who is interested in all the oppressed and victimized regions of the Islamic geography, still continues her struggle in this field through foundations, associations and social media.

## Literature-Art



Leila Aboulela

*“Literature and the arts are the right way to combat Islamophobia and misrepresentation. Fiction does not threaten. If you present a piece of Islamic culture, be it a novel, a piece of music, a dance or even a dish, most people are happy with that.”*

Leila Aboulela, born in 1964, is a writer of Sudanese descent, one of Africa's most distinguished women. She currently lives in Scotland. During the years when Islamophobia and xenophobia were on the rise in the UK, she made a name for herself with novels such as *Translator* and *Minaret* and received various international awards. She was awarded the prestigious African Caine Prize for her short story “Museum”. In her works, Aboulela, who is a good novelist and short story writer, aims to tell the inner world of Muslim women and touches upon the identity problems they face. The author, who aims to be the voice of Muslim women in her works where the East-West synthesis is seen, expresses the search for identity of Muslim women between religion and modernity with a wide perspective from Sudanese society to Europe.





Cihan Aktaş

Cihan Aktaş, one of the most powerful novelists of contemporary Turkish literature, has written and continues to write on a wide range of topics from architecture to urbanism, from women's issues to cinema. Aktaş first appeared in publications such as *Yeni Şafak* and *Yeni Devir*. Her book *Bacı'dan Bayana/İslamcı Kadınların Kamusal Alan Tecrübesi (From Bacı to Bayan/Islamist Women's Experience of Public Space)* caused controversy at the time of its publication and was confiscated by court order. She has received various awards from the Writers' Union of Türkiye, notably story writer of the year and novelist of the year. Cihan Aktaş, whose works are especially in the field of literature, has many works. *Kusursuz Piknik*, *Duvarsız Odalar* and *Mahremiyetin Tükenişi* are some of his works. Aktaş's latest works are: *Şair ve Gecekuşu*, *Hayallerin Ötesi: Hayat-Temsil-Sinema*, *Seattle Günlüğü*.

## Cinema



Waad al-Kateab

"People would be surprised to see me without a camera."

When the crisis erupted in Syria in 2011, Syrian woman filmmaker and activist Waad al-Kateab, as a journalist, captured images of the crisis for the world to see. In the meantime, she received many international awards in the field of media, including the International Emmy Award. The images in Al-Kateab's archive during that period led to the documentary *For Sama*. The 96th-minute documentary, which won the award for best documentary at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival, is based on Al-Kateab's 500 hours of footage. The documentary tells the story of the people's struggle in the Syrian civil war between 2012 and 2016. Waad al-Kateab continues to work as an activist with his advocacy campaign "Action for Sama".

## Science



Dr. Rana Dajani

Ranked 13<sup>th</sup> in the list of “100 Most Powerful Arab Women in the World” and awarded with the Jacobs social entrepreneur award, Dr Rana Dajani holds a PhD in molecular biology from the University of Iowa. She focuses on molecular biology, genetics and stem cell research, and has been working on epi-genetic and bio-markers of refugee trauma. She has produced studies that reconcile the theory of biological evolution with Islam. Due to her pioneering efforts in this field, her scientific work was supported in his country and in many international organizations and she played an active role in the transformation of laws. She has led to the enactment of national and regional stem cell laws. Dajani has pioneered efforts to support women and children in the fields of health and education and is the founder of the organization “We Love Reading”, which promotes reading for women and children.

## Civil Society



Tawakkol Karman

*“The journey to freedom through non-violence is less bloody and more guaranteed.”*

Human rights activist and journalist Tawakkol Karman is known as the “mother of the revolution”, the “iron woman” and the “lady of the Arab Spring”. She has become a leading figure in the youth movements in Yemen and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011. In addition to being the first Arab woman and the second Muslim woman to receive the Nobel Peace Prize, she was also the youngest woman to receive the prize at the age of 32. Karman is a figure who embraces non-violence against the culture of violence in her country and calls on political instruments and institutions to do so. With this approach, she was able to change the stereotypical image of Yemen. Arrested in 2010 along with her husband, Karman disturbed the regime with her peaceful protests. She founded the human rights group Women Journalists and the Peaceful Popular Youth Revolutionary Council.



Siti Noordjannah Djohantini

Indonesian Islamic scholar Siti Noordjannah Djohantini is the leader of Aisiyyah, the female branch of the Muhammadiyah Movement, one of Indonesia's most important religious movements. In addition to her active role in the Muhammadiyah Movement, she is also known as a woman activist. She is one of the founders of Yayasan Annisa Swasti, the first women's non-governmental organization in Indonesia. This organization works for the empowerment of women and the education of working women. Djohantini stands out as a pioneering woman because of her work for women. Djohantini believes that the most effective way to live a useful life and help women is through civil society activities and focuses on fundamental problems such as social conflict, inequality, social violence and poverty.

## Politics



Halimah Yacob

Halimah Yacob, a Singaporean politician of Malay origin, holds a bachelor's and master's degree in law. At the same time, she was involved in labour rights activities in the National Trade Union Congress and later served as the director of the Singapore Institute of Labour Studies. She served as the Minister of Community Development, Youth and Sports and president of the Parliament. Halimah Yacob, who was unopposed for the presidency, became the first woman in Singapore's history and the world's first headscarved president. After becoming President, she emphasized the importance of multinationalism and meritocracy and stated that she would fight against extremist terrorism and Islamophobia, which she described as twin threats. In 2019, in her speech at the Asian Women's Forum, she advocated for companies to adopt gender equality and criticized the discourse of local media towards women.

## Architecture



Zaha Hadid

Iraqi-born Zaha Hadid is known for her deconstructivist drawings in architecture. She studied mathematics at the American University of Beirut and architecture at the London Architectural Association. She blended her knowledge of mathematics with her designs, Hadid created original drawings. In 1979, she founded Zaha Hadid Architects; her first project was the Vitra Fire Station in Weil am Rhein, Germany. Hadid's work evolved over time, and the sharp lines she used in the early days gave way to organic forms influenced by topography and the condition of the land. Hadid's aim was not to set any boundaries between the interior and the exterior. The forms she uses are generally curved, fluid, wave-like, in an unfamiliar style. Known as the "queen of curves" because she disliked right angles and did not use them in her designs, Zaha Hadid became one of the most important and favourite architects of contemporary architecture with her energy and ideas.

## Music



Büşra Kayıkçı

Pianist Büşra Kayıkçı, who has made a name for herself internationally with her unique style, has a growing audience in Türkiye. Kayıkçı was introduced to different branches of art such as piano, ballet and painting at an early age. As a student at the Faculty of Architecture, Kayıkçı started to compose minimalist and neoclassical compositions for the piano with the inspiration and technique she received from her field of study. Believing that both a designer and a composer walk the same path with different materials, the artist blended these two fields. She gained recognition with her first single Birth and her first album Sketches. Influenced by the minimalism movement, Kayıkçı composes with fewer notes and frequent repetitions. Selected as a finalist in the 27<sup>th</sup> Istanbul Jazz Festival young jazz competition, Kayıkçı gives solo concerts with his original compositions.

## Islamic Sciences



Farhat Hashmi

Farhat Hashmi is one of the most influential Muslim women scholars of our time, having studied at Sargodha Degree College and Punjab University, Lahore, Pakistan, where she received her BA and MA degrees, and completed her PhD in Hadith Studies at the University of Glasgow. Aware of the need to make the Qur'an more understandable for women, she pioneered the establishment of an Islamic education center called Al-Huda International Welfare Foundation. She has published on women's rights, roles and responsibilities based on the Qur'an and the Sunnah, and the contributions of Muslim women scholars to the development of the science of hadith. Through her work, Hashmi has succeeded in being a role model for women and has created global awareness with her initiative to understand the Qur'an. In 2010, she was listed among the 500 most influential Muslims.

## Business-Economy



Saadia Zahidi

Saadia Zahidi is a Pakistani-born economist who has twice made the BBC's list of the 100 most influential and inspiring women in 2013 and 2014. She is the Executive Director of the World Economic Forum and the youngest member of the organization's board of directors. Her book *Fifty Million Rising: The New Generation of Working Women Transforming the Muslim World* won the Financial Times award for the best economics book of the year. Saadia Zahidi, who continues to hold senior positions at the World Economic Forum, is a prominent figure in the field of economics in the Muslim world.



Muna Abu Suleyman

Muna Abu Suleyman is a Saudi Arabian businesswoman and activist. She has made speeches at the United Nations to explain the difficulties faced by young people. Muna, who has the distinction of being the first woman appointed as a goodwill ambassador in Saudi Arabia, has also carried out activities in various countries. Muna, who is one of the pioneering women in Saudi Arabia in the field of television, is one of the founding hosts of the program "Kalam Nawaem". This program was the most watched program in the Arab world for a long time. In 2009, Muna was included in the list of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world, and in 2019, she was named the most influential person on Twitter by the World Social Media Platform.

# Women of Africa

## An Interview with Haticce Çolak, Head of Assalam Association

*“Mama Samia is a mother who, like many heroines in African history, has led silent revolutions.”*

**As the founder of the Assalam Foundation established in Zanzibar, you carry out many valuable projects with Assalam. As a woman, you are a name that has accomplished important works in the field of civil society. Could you briefly tell us about your life story leading to Zanzibar and Assalam’s activities?**

I believe very much in the transformative role of women in society. I did my master’s degree on the politicization of women and my PhD was on Islamic unity. At Assalam, we are making silent revolutions, partly through the Nana Esma model, that is, through young girls and widows. This transformation is taking place not only among African women, but also among thousands of women from all over the world who are our volunteers and donors. Like Nana Esma, we are not doing this in a feminist way, there are also men among us. Together, we are trying to support each other and overcome difficulties.

Geography is destiny and Zanzibar is my destiny, but I have known many wonderful women who have started similar movements in many other parts of the world too. Nana Esma and her likes, women who rarely come to forefront, are the actual catalysts who keep changing the world consistently yet quietly.



“

**An important characteristic of women leaders is that they do not come to power by shouting, nor do they shout their reforms.**

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We established Assalam with the inspiration we received from these women. Assalam is a new generation social enterprise that produces projects that stand on their own feet with the goal of “a self-sufficient Africa”. We aim to produce sustainable solutions and income sources for Africa’s problems, to establish collaborations around the world, to create quality education opportunities for children and women, and to be a role model for other NGOs in the world in this context.

**Samia Suluhu Hassan, Tanzania’s first female President, is a powerful portrait of a Muslim woman ruler. As a head of state, Mrs Samia is a source of hope for the people of the region, especially for women. As a person who has been in Tanzania for many years, can you tell us about your thoughts regarding Samia Suluhu Hasan?**

We first met Mama Samia in the summer of 2019, the first year of our school. Our students prepared and performed a play representing the tribes in front of her. Mrs Samia was the vice president at that time, but she was still the same “Mama Samia”.

The following year she visited our school, caressed the heads of our children, chatted with our mothers and young girls. Each of her visits was a morale booster for everyone in the village. The fact that the most important person from our village was a woman was also a source of pride and hope for our foundation, which focuses on women’s projects especially when there are so many obstacles in front of us that could break our hopes.

The next year Mama Samia became president but she came to our village again. Again, she asked about our well-being, with all her sincerity. The last time we met was on the occasion of the mevlit she gave in the modest house she had built for herself in our village. She sat on the floor like us, we made eye to eye contact many times hence talked about many things without even uttering words. She knew, as we did, how important her very presence was for us. We believe that if God wills, each of our students can become a great hero like her.

When we look at women leaders in history, we are always confronted with the figure of a king, a father or a husband. However, from the time Mama Samia was born in Zanzibar in 1960, up until 1991, when she started taking leadership courses in Lahore and Hyderabad, she had a very local upbringing with no privileges, therefore her surviving clan still lives off fishing and agriculture in a village in Zanzibar.

However, her involvement in a project with the World Food Program at the age of 32, and her postgraduate studies in economics at the Universities of Manchester and New Hampshire in her forties, led to different openings in her political career. She was elected to the cabinet in her 40s, became a minister at 45 and vice-president at 55. Now 63 years old, Mama Samia’s real journey has only just begun, and we believe that she has much more to contribute to Tanzania and leave deep traces behind.

More than being the first Muslim and female president of Tanzania, or one of the very few Africans to be named among the 100 most influential women in the world by Forbes, or the second female leader of East Africa in history, and many other firsts associated with her name, Mama Samia is for us, our next door neighbour, a woman from our village, a real mother with a heartfelt smile. Like many heroines in African history, she is a mother who leads silent revolutions.

**What are the impacts of Samia Suluhu Hassan as a Muslim woman and administrator in Tanzania? How have Mrs Samia’s policies contributed to civil society and the empowerment of women in public roles?**

An important characteristic of women leaders is that they do not come to power by shouting, nor do they shout their reforms. Since coming to power, Mama Samia has implemented reforms in many areas, from press freedom to the economy and health care, despite fierce protests within her own party.

Unlike the inward-looking policies of the previous President Magufuli, Mama Samia started to establish

Mary Chatan, President of the United Women's Association of Tanzania, presents a gift to Samia Suluhu Hasan.



strong relations by personally visiting many countries after becoming the head of state; she even acted in documentary films to introduce her country to the world. Her visit to the USA alone brought 1 billion dollars of investment to the country.

Although she did not like to be compared to the previous president, the change was so clear that Mama Samia's outward-looking demeanour attracted the attention of the whole world after Magufuli, who had a reputation of a "bulldozer" and had travelled abroad only ten times during his six years in power, all of them in Africa, and had been harsh on foreign investors, especially the mining companies.

For the time being, Mama Samia is pardoning and recalling politically banned opposition politicians who were exiled; making democratic inroads in the electoral and constitutional process; trying to bring pregnant women who were banned from school back to education and thus to life; and reopening closed media outlets. Tanzania, with Africa's sixth largest natural gas reserves, has announced that it is looking for a market in Europe and has rolled up its sleeves for a \$10 billion mega-port in Bagamoyo, a city just half an hour north of Dar es Salaam that

could be an alternative to Mombasa; hence now asserting itself effectively as a leader in the region.

**Can you give examples of the role of women in the public sphere in Africa and of influential female personalities in Africa? Are women in Africa strong enough in the political and social sphere? What projects are being implemented in Africa to empower women publicly and economically?**

There are 54 different countries in Africa. Born in 800, Fatima al-Fihri from Morocco, who founded the world's first university, was an African woman, but thousands of women over time have been prevented even from stepping out of their houses by groups like Boko Haram or many radical organizations. Of course, we cannot say that women are sufficiently strong hence we have a long way to go, but we can definitely say that there is hope. Especially in recent years, some institutions that have realized that small steps hardly carry a benefit and a holistic approach is needed, have started to carry out effective projects on women's empowerment. From micro-credit to vocational trainings, there are very successful examples not only in Africa but all over the world; as Assalam, we want to be one of these inspiring examples.





**Which other women come to mind when you think of Africa and personalities who have left a mark?**

In fact, Africa is full of female characters such as Cleopatra and Nefertiti or Queen Candace of Meroe, whose history has not forgotten for thousands of years. We do not hear similar stories from the history of any Western country. There are women who are remembered as the mothers or wives of prophets or kings, but it is not possible to come across a truly independent and ruling female profile before the 19th century in another place. However, in Ethiopia alone, we can talk about 21 queens who ruled until the 9<sup>th</sup> century. For example, there is the Nigerian Nana Esma, whose father, husband, uncle and twin brother were warriors and politicians, and whose methods of governance were far more effective than theirs. The reformist Nana Esma, who corresponded with governors, negotiated with scholars, translated many books she brought from the Arab world into local languages for her students, catalogued hundreds of her father's books written in four languages and shared them with centres of knowledge all over Africa, and managed to use her position and all the talents God had endowed her with for the rights of women and to carry progressive ideas from the palace to all levels of society.

Nana Esma is a woman who speaks and writes four languages fluently, including Arabic (Hausa, Fulani, Tamachek), who was educated in Islamic law, Qur'anic and Hadith sciences as well as Greek and Latin literature, who was instrumental in conversion of many local tribes to Islam after entering their empires with her translations of the Qur'an and works on Sufism and poetry in the tribal languages she mastered, and who then organized women from these communities and trained women leaders from disadvantaged groups in her organization called Yan Taru.

Nana Esma, who died at the age of 71, has nearly 60 works surviving to this day. Her poems had travelled beyond the borders of the Sokoto empire in her own time and had become famous in many African countries and the Middle East. The education system she established is still used in many countries and schools, universities, foundations and conference halls are still being opened in her name all over Africa. Mama Samia had three children while Nana Esma had five children. Both of them never developed a feminist discourse. They did not have both a child and a career; they had both a child and a revolution.

Have you ever heard of Mama Asta from Senegal, a Maliki jurist? She was one of the organizers of the Muridiya movement, which had a great role in the

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***Mama Samia is for us, our next door neighbour,  
a woman from our village, a real mother with a heartfelt smile.  
Like many heroines in African history, she is a mother who  
leads silent revolutions.***

”

independence of Senegal. She was a heroic woman who was influenced by the famous sheikh Ahmad Bamba, who always supported and encouraged her.

Or do you know about Ella Little-Collins, the older sister who brought up Malcolm X? From the age of 14, Ella took him with her, made him go on a pilgrimage, fought for the rights of black people hence Malcolm X referred to her as “The first black woman I know and am proud of”.

In fact, when we look at the history of Islam, the strong influence of black women starts with the Prophet’s mother Barakah, who came from Ethiopia. Barakah, who is better known as Umm Aymen, who knew the Prophet (pbuh) since the pregnancy of his mother Hz Amine, who protected and cared for him after the death of his mother and then his grandfather, whom the Prophet (pbuh) heralded with the glad tidings of paradise and described as “my mother after my mother”, who was one of the first Muslims, who was present at the battle of Uhud and who survived after the Prophet (pbuh) until the caliphate of Osman. Another Ethiopian heroine is Sumayyah, whom we know as the first Muslim martyr. We think there is hardly anyone who does not know her honourable story.

Another famous African woman like her is Fatima al-Fihri of Fez, born in 800, who founded the first university in history, al-Qarawiyyin University, which produced graduates such as Ibn Khaldun, Averroes, Maimonides and Aurillac, whose ideas and inventions changed the world.

And then there are those we have never heard of. For example, Sayyida Al-Hurra, who died in 1552, was an African Muslim heroine, a pirate queen, who was exiled from Granada and defended her country against the Portuguese throughout her life.

By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of influential women was much higher

These women, only some of whom we have been able to mention, have been recorded in history and are internationally renowned, and many of them are famous for their resistance to colonial systems. However, in Africa, which is largely governed by a tribal system and where only oral history exists, many of such women may have been forgotten. By the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of influential women had increased significantly in this region.

The Egyptian nationalist Huda Shaarawi (1879-1947), who organized a women’s social service organization and became the founding president of the Arab feminist union and a voice for women’s rights throughout the Arab and European world, or Bibi Titi Mohamed (1926-2000), who combined her identity as a singer with her political identity to become one of the leaders of the Tanzanian nationalist movement and recruited more than six thousand women into the party of the independence leader Nyerere. There are dozens of such women, and if we include non-Muslims, hundreds more.

Although we have briefly mentioned here the inspiring stories of many strong African Muslim women, there is no doubt that women in Africa and the world still have a long way to go.

# Being a Muslim Woman in Academia



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<http://dx.doi.org/10.26414/pmdg13>

Depending on what people define themselves as, what they place where in their lives should also be revealed to some extent. For example, I define myself as a human being first and foremost, because the Creator created me that way. Since He created me with a Muslim nature and desires us to preserve that nature, I see this as my second basic identity. My gender comes next. My gender that the Creator has wisely decided for me. Therefore, if we go from top to bottom, I can define myself as a human being, but a Muslim human being and finally a Muslim woman. In this article, I will talk about being a Muslim woman in academia and especially in the field of Islamic economics in light of the latter two identities.

## Basic Problems

First of all, due to well-known socio-political reasons, for a long time in this country, it was not possible to appear on the academic scene with the identity of a Muslim woman, especially if the related symbols were present in the person. This situation was generally valid for both those who received education and those who imparted education. In general terms, it can be said that working as an academician in Türkiye carrying an identity of a Muslim woman is still a fairly new phenomenon. As can be understood from the above introduction, one of the main problems of being a woman in academia was to have a visible Muslim identity. I do not have any clear information about whether this has already improved to the same extent everywhere. However, at least in terms of my own personal experience, I can say that, thankfully, this problem has been overcome.

In academia, as I think is the case in other fields of work, having a Muslim woman identity can not only be a problem for those who take a stance against that identity but also for those who do not have a direct problem with that identity. Of course, the nature of the problem changes across the two groups. The main focus of the problem here is, in general, the issue of whether women should work or not. Since the article is not about this, I will not go into the details of this subject here. At this point, as a woman, it may be of particular importance to show that you are much better than all your male competitors who are likely to apply for the same academic position as you. Opening an additional parenthesis here, I do not find it appropriate for a

woman to be preferred over a man for the same position, even though he is better than her, just because she is a woman, and vice versa. I believe that the reason for preference should be merit, not gender. Unless there is a gender that is particularly preferred due to the nature of the job and/or working conditions and environment. I would like to point out an important point that should not be forgotten; sometimes, for various reasons, women may need to support a household and take care of their relatives alone, and in this case, making recruitment difficult or preventing it altogether can cause serious problems. I think it should be important for recruiters to examine whether such situation exists.

## Female Identity in Academia

What kind of difficulties can women, especially women who work with a Muslim identity, experience after entering academia? The answer to this question will again be related to the two paragraphs above. As a continuation of the problem mentioned in the first paragraph, Muslim women may be more prone to mobbing due to carrying their particular identity in academia. The academic environment may

exacerbate this to some extent because both the mobbing perpetrators consider themselves “more educated” and the mobbed person thinks that she is subjected to this despite being educated. Related to the problem in the second paragraph, the fact that female academics, especially if they are relatively young, give lectures, seminars, etc. to classes or groups where older, “more senior” men are in the majority - and this is mostly the case for those at master’s and PhD levels - can be a task difficult for them to handle from the very beginning. Based on my personal experience here, I can say that as long as you maintain a certain level of general behaviour, the higher your level of knowledge and the more you can reflect it, the easier it is to overcome this seemingly heavy burden. After all, goodwill, sincerity and appreciation of knowledge is a much more dominant factor than prejudices.

Another problem that may arise in connection with the previous issue is that the focus on constantly becoming better and more knowledgeable may be overdone, leading to a perception of both the female academic and those who come into contact with her as: at best a sexless, at worst a masculine female figure. Of these, desexualisation can take





place in different forms. For example, through the meanings that culture attributes to terms such as “sister, elder, mother”. Thus, the female academic, whether she is of the right age or not, can easily be forgotten as a woman and instead regarded and addressed in respect by everyone as an older sister or motherly figure. This is not necessarily problematic for everyone and in every environment, but there are many situations where it is generally inappropriate. The main reasons for this inappropriateness are, in my opinion, the inability to reflect, evaluate, understand or appreciate the characteristics that Allah has given to the female nature. The second problem is the emergence of a masculine female academic profile, although an extreme example, can lead to strange situations such as one mentioned in Adalet Ağaoğlu’s novel *Ölmeye Yatmak*.

At this point, the possibility of overemphasising femininity can be mentioned as another extreme, just like in other fields of work. However, I can say that the phenomenon of religion guides or should guide a female academic who wants to have a Muslim identity, especially in terms of rights, limits and obligations.

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***In general terms, it can be said that working as an academician in Türkiye carrying an identity of a Muslim woman is still a fairly new phenomenon.***

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One of the difficulties that I think women experience especially in academia, more than in other fields of work - at least in my view - is that they are directly considered “superior” due to their title and position. Considering gender-based relationship dynamics, this can be problematic. In any case, the fact that people build the course of their behaviour towards each other on elements such as worldliness, temporary title, authority, position and fame creates a wide variety of problems.

Finally, as I will mention in the next section, although I think that academia is a very suitable profession for women to carry out together with their home life, there still may be women who have difficulties in carrying academia and home life together for various reasons. Education institution -without worsening other conditions- should make improvements in issues such as women’s maternity, nursery facilities.

## Advantages of Academics for Women

First of all, I think it would be useful to state that I do not consider it very appropriate for either men or women to choose the jobs to be done only and even basically on the basis of advantages, that is, a pragmatic perspective on the subject. I think that making a pragmatic choice by focusing on advantageous situations such as flexible working hours and title both ignores the possible disadvantages and difficulties of the academia, and basically leads to a tendency towards a job that is independent of one’s skills and interests. This ultimately leads to inefficiency as it disrupts the appropriate job-suitable employee equation. With this note, I can focus on the advantageous points of academia, especially for women.

One of the advantages is definitely flexible working hours. Flexible working is a phenomenon that has been brought up more frequently especially in the post-Covid pandemic period. The opportunity to work flexibly is important for academic women in terms of being able to adjust their class schedules according to themselves. This allows them to spend more time with their families. In addition, flexible

working hours offer academics the opportunity to be less stressed and more productive.

I think the most important advantage of academia for a woman is that it is a perfect fit for those who love activities such as reading, writing, narrating and researching. I think that academia offers a more stable working atmosphere where you can keep it to yourself rather than the more predatory, turbulent, stressful, mobile, changing work environments of the private sector.

## Being a Female Academic in the Field of Islamic Economics

There are quite a lot of Malaysian and Indonesian women Islamic economists or graduate students in the field of Islamic economics. However, the situation changes when it comes to Türkiye. Of course, there are various reasons for this. First of all, the field of Islamic economics is an area from which not only women, but male academics have also abstained for a long time due to the political and social conjuncture. Secondly, the additional political conjuncture effect I mentioned at the beginning of the article on female academics is another reality. Thirdly, due to the relatively late spread and late graduation of postgraduate candidates in the field, the new generation increasingly sees academy as a heavy job, and female students growing up in the field find it difficult to continue as academicians for various reasons. As a result of these reasons, the number of women who work as academicians in the field of Islamic economics, that is, give lectures and carry out academic studies within a university, is almost non-existent in Türkiye.

I would like to reiterate the note I made at the beginning of this article and say that the main goal should not be to concentrate on people of a certain gender in academia hence recruitment should be based on merit. However, the scarcity of female academics, especially in the field of Islamic economics, may lead to the problem of not reaching the predominantly female student population in undergraduate departments.

# “ Women fighting for the rights that Islam grants them ”

Interview with  
Journalist-Activist  
Lauren Booth

**Having converted to Islam in 2010, you are an inspiration for many as a writer, journalist, activist and a revert woman who wears a headscarf. How do you evaluate your 13 years of experience as a Muslim woman? Can you share some of the challenges and opportunities you have experienced?**

The starting point is never to see an obligation in our religion as a hurdle to real success. Real success is measured by The Creator’s pleasure with our actions and the continued awareness that this life is not the final destination but a dangerous, potentially rewarding, route stop, to eternal bliss (inshallah!) What this mindset allowed me (in light of losing position in the mainstream due to accepting Islam) the ability to welcome challenges as a chance to seek greater good through my words, creating work that matters rather than as a means to pay the bills or become ‘well known’. The periods of financial hardship and front-page mockery which followed my acceptance of Islam, built in me, by Allah’s grace a resilience and determination to stand up for truths which matter and never, ever, negotiate faith requirements for short term gains. Alhamdulillah, shukr Allah.

**Being a journalist, you must have closely observed the image of Muslim women as it is portrayed by the Western media. Are you of the opinion that Muslim women in the Islamic world are being oppressed and harassed? If so, is the root cause of this oppression Islam or other traditions? What are your thoughts?**

The ideas of femaleness absorbed and increasingly rejected by young Muslim women do not have their roots in the Quran and ‘Islam’ - they come from a toxic modernity which has polluted our cultures. During colonialist rule, Western governments and missionary schools introduced their own beliefs about femininity to Muslim lands. British forces pushed across North Africa, the Middle East and India, which included today’s Bangladesh and Pakistan. Their concept of the Victorian delicate and fainting woman clashed with the examples of bravery in battle of Safiyya bint Abdul Muttalib. Yet they began to permeate local cultures where Muslim history books were banned from education, madrasahs were closed, and an English curriculum and orthodoxy imposed in every area of life. This, over time was blended with a well-funded doctrine which has tried to create “an idea woman.” One with limited parameters in the public and political realms. In short, a version of the



Victorian age where children were to be ‘seen not heard.’ Where Muslim women became ‘not seen and not heard.’ Meanwhile, the sexualization of women, and especially Muslim women, also became part of our own, slanted views on the feminine ethos. The harem became an orientalist trope while, in reality, it remained the place where women gathered to do laundry and cook without the need for hijab in a space where men were not allowed. As I have learnt whilst living in Istanbul, the mothers of the Sultans ‘Valide’ and many wives and daughters are behind some of the most pivotal architecture we take for granted across the Ottoman Empire. Their personal fortunes fed and watered those on Hajj and rebuilt and helped sustain Masjid Al Aqsa.

In the 1950s, the veil played an important role during the Algerian war of independence against the French colonial rule. In the 1950s, the veil played an important role during the Algerian war of independence against the French colonial rule. Frantz Fanon, a Martinique-born psychiatrist and anti-colonial intellectual, described the French colonial doctrine in Algeria as follows: If we want to destroy the structure of Algerian society, its capacity for resistance, we must first of all conquer the women;

we must go and find them behind the veil where they hide themselves and, in the houses, where the men keep them out of sight.’ Fanon was a member of the Algerian National Liberation Front who considered women’s ill-treatment by the French army to embody the whole country’s situation. For him, it was impossible for the colonial power to conquer Algeria without winning over its women to European “norms”. Women were made to feel ashamed of covering and like today, contemplated on whether our very difference in the public realm made us backward and unworthy compared to the less dressed ‘free’ western women. In 1958, during the Algerian war of independence, mass “unveiling” ceremonies were staged across Algeria. But historians would later find that some of the women who participated in these ceremonies never even wore the veil before. Others were pressured by the army to participate. Following the ‘staged unveilings’, many Algerian women began wearing the veil. They wanted to make clear that they would define the terms of their emancipation – rather than being forcefully liberated by the French colonizers. This generation of Muslim women are still in the fight to define the terms of our emancipation according to Islamic parameters which take from



neither broken western models nor eastern norms which are a corrupted version of Prophetic care and nurturing.

**We witness that women’s participation in socio-political life has been increasing in Muslim societies in general. How do you evaluate it and what can be done to promote women activism in socio-political and economic life?**

The questions hint that women either did not have this aspiration or did not participate in previous generations, which is not the case. The question really is why since the time of the early Muslim communities have female believers been gradually removed from importance in certain regions of the ummah? When we couch questions like this, we must be aware that doing so can create in us, as women, a reactionary impulse whereby Western social mores tell us we must be more aggressive at ‘getting our space’. In fact, our faith role models teach us that women can be both gentle and present, strong and modest, polite and determined. What is needed then, is the opening for more spaces, where our voices can be heard, and our ideas enacted. Personally, since, by the grace of Allah, having a man to care for me financially, I want to honour the work of women at home who daily change the community via social projects, charity and frankly - backbone. There is more than one way to change society. Having lived the power suit life, I do not see it as the prototype for female activism. Find your space sisters! Let us follow this call from the Holy Quran: “The believing men and believing women are allies of one another. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong and establish prayer and give zakāh and obey Allāh and His Messenger. Those - Allāh will have mercy upon them. Indeed, Allāh is Exalted in Might and Wise. (Holy Quran 9:71)

**The rights of Muslim women and their participation in social life can be associated with feminism by some groups, so much so that there is a so-called phenomenon called Islamic feminism. Where do you think Muslim women should stand in this conceptual confusion? Do Muslim women have to choose one of the two options; patriarchy and feminism?**

I often get asked by brothers and sisters ‘So what do you do these days?’ To which my husband and I roll our eyes. Inherent in the question is the unfortunate materialism of the current moment. ‘Islamic

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***Their concept of the Victorian delicate and fainting woman clashed with the examples of bravery in battle of Safiyya bint Abdul Muttalib***

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feminism’ doesn’t answer the Islamic side of the question; ‘Who are you? And what are your values?’ It merely demands a westernized version of our reality as in ‘what is your net worth’ whilst subliminally adding ‘whatever you are doing won’t be enough by the way...’ The ultimate father and mother archetypes are Adam and Eve. We are united, both as believers (the ummah of Islam) and as brothers and sisters of this global family - the ummah of humanity. By drinking from the poisoned cup of gender ideology we put the greatest of all creation, Prophet Muhammad SAWS, into the ‘wrong’ camp - i.e. manhood. He is, factually, a man, leading the story of Islam. Do we really need to then ask like rather petulant children ‘where is the female leader?’ Come on!

Sachiko Murata, in *The Tao of Islam: A Sourcebook on Gender Relationships in Islamic Thought*, points out that despite the all-too real misogyny that exists in various parts of the Muslim world, in ‘Islamic cosmology neither the masculine nor the feminine - neither the father nor the mother - are sublimated. Both play essential and complimentary roles.’ Feminism is a fighting posture. Muslim womanhood is an open-handed palm raised upwards calling for energy and vigour from a Creator who is beyond gender and who honors us blessed beings with essential differences vital to societies success.

# Book Review: Do Muslim Women Need Saving?

Abu-Lughod, L. (2015). *Do Muslim women need saving?* Harvard University Press.



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<http://dx.doi.org/10.26414/pmdg14>

Lila Abu-Lughod, born 21 October 1952, is a Palestinian-American anthropologist. Having completed her MA and PhD at Harvard University, Abu-Lughod's Egypt-based ethnographic work is central to her scholarly output. Her research focuses on cultural forms and power, the politics of knowledge and representation in Arab and Muslim geographies, gender dynamics in the Middle East, global feminist politics, and human and women's rights-centred issues.<sup>1</sup> Penning important titles like *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and and Poetry in a Bedouin Society* published in 1986 and *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* in 2013, she has been working intensively in this field for more than thirty years as a professor at Columbia University.

This book titled *Do Muslim Woman Need Saving?* is a collective presentation of the author's thoughts and arguments based on her years of research and the experiences she carries. The author tries to answer the question posed in the book's title from her own point of view and referring to her own experiences by touching on different points across different chapters. The work is a challenge and an intellectual antithesis to the framework created by the defenders of the dominant thought regarding "Muslim woman" and their presumptive mission to rescue her from the "plight". The work can be considered as a manifesto since it contains the answer, "The phenomenon you call Muslim woman does not need to be saved by anyone". In fact, the function of these conceptualizations and who they serve are the questions the book poses to the other side.

Despite her answer that Muslim women do not need to be saved, Abu-Lughod does not intend to cover up the plight of women, such as being killed, humiliated, persecuted and harassed. Even though she states that she has a sharp disagreement with the feminist organizations that try to put women into a single mould by ignoring their diversity and striving to "be like us", she does not ignore the efforts of these organizations to seek justice and rights for the women of the world and does not see them as completely useless. The author invites these organizations to put aside their attempts to marginalise, denigrate, and even rescue women's lives, which are shaped according to socio-political conditions, by calling them

<sup>1</sup> For information on Abu-Lughod see: <https://anthropology.columbia.edu/content/lila-abu-lughod>

“ **The work is a challenge and an intellectual antithesis to the framework created by the defenders of the dominant thought regarding “Muslim woman” and their presumptive mission to rescue her from the “plight”.** ”

“their own culture” and to respect women’s different conceptions of rights, justice and future with the awareness that we live in an interactive world. According to the author, the idea that any injustice suffered by women is associated with their religion is an obstacle to a healthy understanding of these women. This derogatory language must be abandoned, and the stereotypical construction of Muslim women must stop.

Describing what she does as “writing against culture”, Abu-Lughod, as an anthropologist, takes a critical stance against the attitude of “stereotyping cultural differences”, which is an extension of anthropology’s connection with colonial powers. The author states that the bad situations women fall into or are subjected to are associated with Islam and a cultural phenomenon attributed to it with a reductionist approach; this approach constructs a geography that is characterized as “Islam Land”. One of the main theses of the book is to show that such a geography does not exist and that Islamic countries are not homogenous but different from each other. One of the main theses defended by the author with many arguments and under various headings is the idea that, contrary to the fact that women’s grievances are caused by Islam and a life associated with it, which is constantly instilled by the West; the reasons are rooted in the political functioning and struggles, economic order, oppressive regimes and gender inequality in the geographies where women live.



Another thesis defended is that this rescue call for women’s rights is an attempt to justify and legitimize many military interventions. The author even characterises these rescue military interventions as Crusades, emphasising the identical motive behind them. Another thesis defended in the book is that veil is not a dress that damages identity or restricts the freedom of Muslim women. The image of a covered woman that comes to mind when a Muslim geography is mentioned, and thus the role of the mentality that associates every negative thing in women’s lives with Islam hence any proposal to save women from

this negativity will naturally aim at saving them from the veil as well. This idea of rescue, which places great emphasis on the concepts of consent, right to choose and freedom, insists on not accepting the idea that the veil is done with free will, as a part of women’s lives rather some women feel freer doing so. Visibly Muslim women do not endeavour to associate the negativities they face with their religion, nor do they try to adapt their clothing to the prevailing fashion.

“Rights and Lives”, the introductory chapter of the eight-chapter book, is the chapter in which the author includes sections on the lives of women from the Arab region. With the diversity she presents here, she wants to show that Muslim women cannot be presented in a single mould and a single type. From this point of view, she refutes the thesis that “Muslim women are under pressure because of their religion and culture”. The chapter titled “Do Muslim Women (Still) Need

**“ With the diversity she presents here, she wants to show that Muslim women cannot be presented in a single mould and a single type. From this point of view, she refutes the thesis that “Muslim women are under pressure because of their religion and culture”.** ”

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Saving?” mentions that military interventions made in line with political interests are tried to be legitimized under the guise of women’s rights. While the injustices suffered by women continue, these military interventions do not prevent these injustices and legitimacy is provided to political interests instead using the slogans of “saving women”. The second section titled “The New Common Sense” presents a criticism of the common sense as found in best-selling books that advocates going to war for women. Especially in the USA, books such as *Half the Sky*, *The Honor Code* and *Caged Virgin*, which focus on Muslim women’s rights, attempt to create a support for going to war for women. In these books, the causes of violations of women’s rights such as violence, rape and abuse are blamed on Islam. Criticizing these accusations, the author criticizes the West for not being self-critical and blaming Islam and Muslims, despite the fact that these crimes are committed at perhaps higher rates in the West.

The chapter “Authorizing Moral Crusades” questions the fact that books full of pornographic events, in which this common sense is legitimized through war for women, interestingly become popular titles. The fourth chapter, “Seductions of the Honor Crime”, deals with the issue of honor killings, a topic that is very common in these books. The fifth chapter, “The Social Life of Muslim Women’s Rights” in Palestine and Egypt, discusses the change and transformation of women’s pursuit of rights through political, and social factors and draws attention to the heterogeneous structure of the pursuit of rights across different geographies. As an anthropologist, the author in the last chapter titled “An Anthropologist in the Territory of Rights”, talks about her awareness of the objectification of women’s rights for political purposes after the intervention in Afghanistan and presents an evaluation of Islamic feminist women organizations.

The concluding chapter titled “Registers of Humanity” consists of arguments in response to the question “Do Muslim women have rights or need to be saved?”. The chapter argues that the victimization of Muslim women should be analysed by taking into account various religious traditions, cultural forms, social and historical facts.

The author introduces her book as “an attempt to unravel how we should think about the question of Muslim women and their rights”. She emphasizes that the book does not promise a solution to these problems, but rather aims to make sense of the phenomenon and to broaden ways of thinking. In parallel with this claim, the book is supported by ethnographic studies and is careful to avoid stereotyping Muslim women in line with the very idea the author presents. The presentation of sections from the lives actually involved contributed to the sincerity of the flow and claims and contributed to the expansion of the perspective. The work makes a valuable contribution by showing that the world of thought, aspirations, meanings attributed to concepts and value judgements of Muslim women are not homogeneous. The point of criticism about this book, which is undeniably a qualified and respected work in many ways, is that it is written in a style that deepens the infrastructure of the East-West concepts and strengthens the otherness fiction. It is obvious that the policy of othering, in which the other side has been despised for centuries, is not solution-oriented. This criticism, which can be dropped as a small footnote to the work, is far from diminishing the importance of the issues that the work draws attention to and the value of bringing them to the fore. I believe that the work in question will be highly appreciated and admired by many women on the grounds that it translates their feelings and thoughts.

# Some Major NGOs Carrying Out Women-Oriented Studies in Muslim Societies

## إسلامنا في كبرياتنا

Sisters in Islam (SIS) was founded in Malaysia in 1988. SIS is a non-governmental organization working to advance the rights of Muslim women in Malaysia.



The Libyan Women's Peace Platform was launched in 2011 by women from different cities of Libya.



Sunbula aims to strengthen the marginalized women groups living in Palestine through traditional handicraft trainings and aims to make them economically independent.



The International Union of Muslim Women (IMWU) was established in Sudan in 1996. IMWU works for egalitarian peace and justice, the rejection of all forms of discrimination, and the promotion of religious-cultural dialogue among all women.



Moroccan Women's Democratic Association (ADFM) was established in Morocco in 1985. ADFM carries out activities for lobbying, networking, and capacity building in the fields of women's rights and gender equality.



Noor Educational and Capacity Building Organization was established in January 2001 by a group of volunteers to help and support Afghan women, youth and children in need. The institution organizes social and humanitarian aid activities in refugee camps and organizes activities for Afghan women, children and youth.



# Some Major NGOs Carrying Out Women-Oriented Studies in Muslim Societies



“ The international We Are All Maryam Platform was established in Turkey in 2019. The platform aims to support the women of Jerusalem and highlight the troubles they are experiencing. It organizes activities aimed at protecting and supporting women’s human and special rights through representatives from different NGOs. ”



“ Muslim Women Lawyers for Human Rights (KARAMAH) was established in 1993 in America. KARAMAH is a non-governmental organization that supports and works on human rights globally, including gender equality, religious freedom, and civil rights, especially in America. KARAMAH maintains its mission through education, legal outreach, and advocacy. ”



“ The Muslim Women’s Council is a platform created to enable Muslim women in the UK to create social networks. The institution, which acts proactively in accordance with the needs of Muslim women, interacts with social, political and media spheres. ”



## Arab Women Organization

“ The Arab Women’s Organization (AWO) was established in 2000 under the roof of the League of Arab States. Its central office is located in Egypt. AWO works to empower Arab women and involve them as equal partners in social development. ”



“ The Muslim women’s network appeared in the UK in 2003. Adopting Islamic feminism, the institution organizes research, as well as advocacy activities and campaigns to protect and develop the rights of Muslim women and inform women about their rights. ”



## Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights

“ The Australian Muslim Women’s Centre for Human Rights works to improve the rights and status of Muslim women in Australia. The movement, which works for the equality and dignity of Muslim women, operates by focusing on the local Muslim women communities in Australia. ”





The Platform is published by TODAM under auspices of ILKE Foundation for Science, Culture and Education in an attempt to provide up-to-date and original perspectives on the intellectual, political, social, economic and cultural affairs of Muslim societies. The Platform is published as part of the Thought and Movements in Muslim Societies Project.

It aims to be a platform where the Muslim world affairs are analysed in light of the activities of major think tanks, research centres and institutes, universities, and political, religious, and social movements. The Muslim world's contributions to global issues and its intellectual advances are presented to Turkiye and the whole world through Platform magazine. The magazine keeps its finger on the pulse of the Muslim world and uses its website and database to share news and developments related to different institutions, movements, activities, and personalities.

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