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Betwixt and Between? Women, the Nation and Islamization in Pakistan

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This essay attempts to explore the question of Pakistani feminism's relationship with the tradition/modernity or secularism/Islamism debate, within the context of the discursive conditions of Islamization as they continue to unfold in response to national and international pressures. I argue that modernity, secularism and the west are not necessarily synonymous, and that new theorizations of Islamic modernity and a secular Islam are the need of the day.

Amina Jamal concludes her essay on feminist discourses in Pakistan by re-framing the tradition/modernity or Islamism/secularism debate which marks the limits—and limitations—of current transnational feminist theory. She suggests that the question posed by Pakistani Muslim feminists in response to the Islamization policies undertaken by the nation-state in recent decades—in itself a phenomenon linked to various practices of imperialist globalization—takes us beyond reinscriptions of a debilitating east/west binary which privileges modernity as a universal discourse of human rights that allows mainstream western feminists to simultaneously pity and patronize non-western Muslim women. While feminist groups gathered under the umbrella of WAF (Women's Action Forum), founded in Pakistan in the 1980s as a counterhegemonic move against the so-called Islamic government of Zia-ul-Haque, have indeed turned to a discourse of Universal Human Rights and to a liberal humanist conception of the individual citizen—their deconstructive, catachrestic engagement with the notion of nation opens up a space for a different kind of question from that which the simplistic, imperialist privileging of modernity over traditionalism generally allows. The question such a deconstructive engagement encourages us to ask, then, is

> What discursive conditions of 'Islamization' make it necessary for women in Pakistan to privilege discourses of universal (western) modernity despite their problematic epistemological and political connotations? (Jamal, 2005, p. 77)

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My own essay proposes to delineate some answers to this question by both instantiating and exposing the limitations of Jamal's theoretical ruminations on Pakistani female subjectivity in a post-9/11 scenario, which has, as Jamal points out, witnessed an exponential rise in both public and private manifestations of extreme religiosity. This 'return to fundamentalism', manifested most publicly in the adoption of the hijab by an ever-increasing number of elite and middle-class urban women (a phenomenon noticeable prior to 9/11, soon after Zia's Islamization programme went into effect in the 1980s), has complicated and curtailed the effectivity and claims to authenticity of the secular women's rights organizations in Pakistan, who privilege the 'discourses of universal (western) modernity' as the basis of their feminist praxis. In order to further explore the question of Pakistani feminism's relationship with the tradition/modernity or secularism/Islamism debate, ever mindful of the discursive conditions of Islamization as they continue to unfold in response to national and international pressures, I shall draw on my experiences during recent visits to Pakistan, the latest involving teaching and living in Lahore, the city of my birth. Having come of age in the 1970s, I came to the USA to pursue my doctorate the same year that Z. A. Bhutto, the democratically-elected Prime Minister of Pakistan, was hanged by the government of the military dictator who had ousted him in 1977, the late general Zia-ul-Haque. While I have continued to live and work here ever since, I have maintained contact with Pakistan through annual visits to my parents' home in Lahore, and have worked with theatre and women rights activists during some of these visits. Last year (October–December 2005), marked the first time I was there in a professional capacity, as a Professor in the Department of English at the prestigious Government College University, invited to set up a program in Postcolonial Studies for M.Phil./Ph.D. students.

A set of interrelated, albeit discrete, questions arose from the space I occupied as teacher within a Pakistani university which provided me with opportunities for interaction and the exchange of ideas with the 16 registered students, all of them instructors at other institutions of 'Higher Education', in Lahore or elsewhere, the majority being women (11 women, 5 men). Simply put, they are:

1. What does it mean to teach postcolonial theory to postcolonials?
2. Why were all my female students (save one) wearing the hijab (head covering) popularized by Islamization across the globe (Pakistan being only one state amongst many in the Muslim world to have gone down this path in the last few decades of the twentieth century)?
3. What does this sartorial gesture signify? How has the situation of women changed discursively between the time I was growing up (including my time as a Masters student at this very institution over 20 years ago, when none of the female students wore the hijab), and from the 1980s onwards?
4. What function does the ideology of the 'home' play in empowering as well as oppressing women? Is it different for women of different classes and locations (urban/rural)?

5. How has the current regime—the dictatorship of President Musharraf, buoyed by US-backing in exchange for cooperation in fighting Al-Qaeda forces in the border regions with Afghanistan, and in restraining Islamic fundamentalism within the country—positioned itself *vis-à-vis* women's rights?

My purpose here is not to provide definitive answers to these questions (if indeed, such answers are even possible),but rather, to offer a symptomatic reading of the state of Pakistani society and culture today which may help concretize the dilemmas and challenges faced by 'secular' women rights activists in Pakistan as outlined by Amina Jamal, as they rub up against precisely the kinds of ideological shifts indicated by the questions outlined above.

'Our Saviour', President Musharraf, in NYC, 2005

President Pervez Musharraf's self-styled 'historic' meeting with Pakistani and Pakistani-American women in New York's Roosevelt Hotel in September 2005 was marked by the chaos and mutual hostility metonymic of the state's troubled relationship with its female citizenry (see Kristof, BBC, Dawn News). Yet paradoxical to observe was the sycophantic role certain women, such as those rewarded with key posts in Musharaff's cabinet, played in delivering (or attempting to!) the 'softer side' of the dictator-generalissimo. Thus, Ms Nilofer Bakhtiar, Minister of Women's Affairs, introduced 'our President' as a 'saviour for women', the 'only ray of hope in an otherwise darkening landscape'. She referred to him as 'a silent warrior who has tackled every obstacle', and 'the chosen oracle of the Almighty'. She was followed on the podium, which was setting the stage for President Musharraf's own speech to the female audience, by Dr Riffat Hassan, Chair of the Department of Religion at Louisville University in Kentucky for ten years. Dr Hassan then got up and announced she would be performing 'hijrat' (a term used to connote the shift of residence from Mecca to Medina that Prophet Mohammad made because of the animosity of the Meccans toward him) from the USA where she had lived and taught for the past three decades of her life, to the Land of the Pure, her original homeland—Pakistan.

Her reason for doing so at this time was all because of President Musharraf's philosophy of Enlightened Moderation, in which he exhorted the Muslim world to shun extremism and once again embrace the tolerance and progressive thought which had once characterized Islam. According to Dr Hassan, President Musharraf had given her a rather generous sum of money to start up an Institute of Islamic Studies in Lahore (to be housed in the same university where I taught last fall, the real source of the funds being the US government, according to the director of a prominent Pakistani Women's NGO)—hence, her 'hijrat'. And naturally enough, Dr Hassan spent quite some time up there on the podium enumerating her many accomplishments in the area of securing women's rights in Pakistan, thus qualifying her as the right person for this job—since as a Muslim theologian, her feminism was based on Islamic precepts, and she was thus a much more representative voice of the average

Pakistani woman than the so-called secular (read: irreligious) women who ran the many women's rights organizations within Pakistan. Never mind the fact that the latter live and work in Pakistan, whereas she had been living and teaching in the USA all of her adult life.

Judging from the comments of these two spokeswomen for the Government of Enlightened Moderation—secured and legitimized by US support following 9/11, given to General Musharraf in return for his willingness to join hands with the US in its War Against Terror by hunting down Al-Qaeda operatives hiding in Pakistan and cracking down on madrassas and religious extremists—women's rights activists are becoming increasingly polarized on the issue of Islam and its place within public discourse and the law as this impacts the lived reality of Pakistan's silent majority of women. While Amina Jamal acknowledges the elite status of the women's rights activists and organizations she bases her study on, she does not account for the rising numbers of women like Dr Hassan and the increasingly popular and powerful Dr Farhat Hashmi, who portray themselves (despite their own elite status due to their educational trajectories)—in populist terms as the authentic leaders of Pakistan's female citizenry of Believers.

December 2003

I am in Karachi attending a family wedding. On the day prior to my departure for New York, I visit a friend who has of late donned an abaya—a long black cloak with head-covering. It is baffling for me to see her usually-exposed luscious curves, which she used to love showing off to good advantage at the evening soirées enjoyed by the elite in Pakistan and at Pakistani-American gatherings (I knew her for several years in New York before she moved back to Karachi), thus covered-up in a garb that until very recently was foreign even to Pakistani women of more modest background and inclinations. She makes what seem to me to be two contradictory claims to explain her change in sartorial taste. 1) She has done it because the man she has finally gotten to marry her after 7 years of being his mistress, has demanded it of her now that she is his legitimate wife. He happens to be the son of a prominent feudal landowner who is also a major player in Pakistani politics. 2) She has seen the light that is true Islam, an Islam that enjoins not just a vague 'modesty' in its followers, but specifically asks believing women to veil their bodies. And the face, I ask?? To which she replies sheepishly, that would be ideal, but not all of us can do that, but Dr Hashmi says as long as we keep trying to get to that state of pure modesty and submission, we will be forgiven . . .

When she told me that Dr Farhat Hashmi was in town and addressing her flock of believing women at a nearby location, I was, naturally, most keen to attend and see first hand what manner of woman had wrought such a miracle on my friend, and countless others as I later found out. A call from my friend to her mentor's center in a nearby shopping center assured me entry to her afternoon lecture, so off I went, armed with a notebook, pen and camera, all safe within the confines of my big red handbag, modestly covered under the folds of a black chador I borrowed from my friend.

The room of the disciples turned out to be a huge hall, spanning the entire length and breadth of the four-storey 'mall' in which it was housed. Hundreds of women—all uniformly clad in black from head to toe in what I later discovered was referred to as 'the ninja outfit' by self-styled liberals—sat on the floor in rows facing the raised dais at the far end of the room which had a chair and microphone waiting for the arrival of the iconic Madame Hashmi. A sea of women-in-black many of them with faces covered (despite being in an all-female gathering)—sat with eyes fixated on the dais, and what looked to be big attendance registers open on their laps, pens in hand like swords ready to attack . . . what? On closer inspection the registers turned out to be copies of the sura (Quranic chapter) that was supposed to be the lesson of the day, with the Arabic scriptlines of the original text spaced out to allow room for writing in their translation into Urdu. The whole idea behind Dr Hashmi's mission, as I found out, was to make her followers understand the actual verses of the Quran by breaking down the vocabulary word by word, sentence by sentence, into comprehensible units in their own language. In an interview with Mona Hydari published in *Dawn* newspaper on 1 January 2003, Hashmi contends that

> The majority of Muslims outside the Arab world don't speak Arabic so they can't understand the Quran without relying on translations. Through our one-year diploma course at Al-Huda and the word-for-word translations available on Audiotape, they will learn to understand the Quran *directly***.** Once you learn to read, recite and understand the Quran properly, you develop an impenetrable bond with the Book—it is then that you can find *guidance to change your life*—and this is the basis of Islamic education. (my emphasis)

In this excerpt, two fundamental precepts of Ms Hashmi's worldview and mission emerge: 1) that one can grasp textual meaning (in this case the Quran's) directly, without mediation; and 2) that this direct, pure, untrammeled understanding of the Quran will lead to change in one's life. From these precepts follow two obvious corollaries. 1) This 'unmediated' access to the Quran will be provided by Ms Hashmi's diploma course held at Al-Huda locations (meaning Centers of Guidance) which have sprung up all over Pakistan within the last decade and also in other parts of the world Muslim and non-Muslim alike (for example, I met a woman there who belonged to an Al-Huda center in West Germany). 2) That such guidance, in turn, will help Muslim women (since her audience is women) change their lives—the assumption being, of course, that their lives need to be changed.

Indeed, my afternoon at the Al-Huda Center confirmed this mission but did so in a way that underscored its latent authoritarianism and exclusionary, even apocalyptic, vision, with the role of women, 'liberated' through Al-Huda's 'proper' Quranic teachings, to serve as role-models who could help shape the Muslim ummah into a united front against western-style decadence and depravity. In her carefully modulated voice, hypnotically lyrical in tone and cadence, Farhat Hashmi held her audience captive for the two hours that she discoursed.

In order perhaps to give her acolytes' fingers some rest from the task of feverishly jotting down her word-for-word literalist translations, Hashmi would from time to time, pause to ask if the women had any questions. The tenor of the questions I heard indicated that these women were convinced they were finally on the right path, yet often had difficulty converting their near and dear ones. These included, particularly, their sisters-in-law or other women in the family, who, for example, would not attend 'dars' (lessons similar to this one on Islamic teachings) or refused to wear abaya or at the very least, the hijab; and their husbands who continued to drink, gamble or simply 'party', and even went so far as to insist that their now-reformed wives join them in these impious activities! What should we do, O Learned One? To which the reply came loud and clear, authenticated by her word-for-word literal translation of a verse from the chapter entitled Al-Imran, 'W'ma W'a Hum Annar' or, 'The Hellfire shall be their Home'. At which utterance, all the women in the room let out a collective moan-like sigh, swaying from right to left in unison, exclaiming, 'God is just; there is no God but God, and Mohammed is his Prophet—La'ila-ha illal-la, Mohammed Ur-Rusul Allah'.

I took this opportunity when everyone including the speaker seemed to be in a trance-like state, to take a quick photograph of the leader who was seated far away on the distance; I wanted just to record in image-form the ambiance of the setting, with all the women swaying to her utterance. Suddenly, She of the Mellifluous Voice opened her eyes wide and exclaimed loudly, 'Did you see that, did anyone see that?' Alas, my little flash from my dinky little camera had been sensed by her, despite her trance, and her body-guard acolytes sprang to attention in the four corners of the hall. As the search began for the culprit, I felt my heart sinking, my body contracting in a futile desire of disappearance. Being the only one without an abaya or hijab, I was spotted almost immediately and asked who I was, whether I was from the media, what was I doing here and so on and so forth. There was no question about having to hand over the camera, despite my protests that I had no intention of using the photo I'd taken for anything other than personal use (yeah, right!)—and telling them it contained all these precious family wedding pictures. The bodyguards, firm and unrelenting, reassured me that after destroying the photo I had just taken, they would get the other pictures to me. Later that evening, at my friend's home, the doorbell rang. It was a woman in an abaya, face covered too, who stepped inside for a moment to hand me my 'amanat' or possession. When I expressed astonished gratitude, she replied curtly, 'What did you think? We are followers of Islam, whose teachings through the Quran we now actually understand thanks to Dr Hashmi; of course we are true to our Word', and left.

December 2004

Here I am, back on my annual visit to Lahore, the city of my birth, staying with my parents. A professional couple I knew during my university days in Boston, and who returned after their studies to 'serve their country'—invite me to attend a Christmas

Eve ball at the fancy-shmansy new elite club for whom they were the architects. A Christmas Eve ball? In Pakistan? Are you serious? They laugh at my ignorance, saying 'where have you been darling?' They laugh even harder when I appear shocked at the price of admission: 25,000 rupees per person—that's approximately $400! For a country whose per capita income in 2002 was reported to be $420 according to a 2004 World Development Report! Even according to a re-based GDP report, this figure is listed as a mere $720 . . . so . . . who were the attendees? I didn't have to pay, being a guest of management (that's how it works in Pakistan for the elite who actually can afford to pay, but don't)—but most of the others did, I presume. It was a very young crowd, for the most part, young and hip. Skinny girls in slinky clothing which looked like it was fresh off the pages of *Vogue* flitted about revealing more skin than I'd ever thought permissible in Pakistan . . . even in the good old days, before the Islamization of the country was begun by the late dictator Zia ul Haque in the 1980s. Tall waiters in tuxedos (?!) appeared, as if by magic, to ask for our drinks orders; without batting an eyelid, my hosts ordered vodka tonics for themselves then turned to ask me what I'd like: some scotch, perhaps? or a glass of red wine? Meanwhile, I stood there dazed, feeling like Rip Van Winkle come awake after sleeping a hundred years. What had happened to the Pakistan of the Mullahs? And of the Farhat Hashmis? What were these Christmas balls? Half-naked girls? Openly-served alcohol? (Oh, and I almost forgot to mention—my hosts proudly boasted that the club was a favourite hang-out of 'Mushie's' (President Musharraf) whenever he was in town; apparently, he loves . . . er . . . golf and this club has the best of them in town . . .)

I needn't have worried. There, as we milled about, bang in the center of the outdoor 'ballroom' under the canopy, was an L-shaped couch. Seated upon it, staring away at all us revelers, was a coterie of women in—you guessed it—hijab. What were they doing here, I wondered aloud? My friends' answer: this is the face of the new Pakistan. On the one hand: women in hijab; on the other, alcohol-imbibing, coke-sniffing, navel-baring model-thin girls out to have a good time.

Shimaila Matri Dawood, writing in an essay that appeared in *Newsline* in March 2005, points to these contrasting images of Pakistani womanhood as indicative of the paradoxical nature of contemporary Pakistani society:

> From teacher-preacher, fundamentalist icon Farhat Hashmi, covered head-to-toe in billows of black, to sassy supermodel, Iraj, clad in just a thong bikini, two images, equally compelling, vie for supremacy in urban Pakistan today. Both tell completely different sides of the Pakistani woman's story. But it is, in fact, these two extremes that capture the very essence of the conflicting realities that govern the life and frame the identity of the Pakistani woman today.

While such contrasting images certainly raise the question of most import to Pakistani feminism—which women and whose rights does it claim to represent/fight for—it is important to note that these images represent the extreme realities of Pakistani womanhood. Both the Islamists and the Hedonists hail by and large from elite urban classes representing less than 2 per cent of the population, and neither can

claim authentically to answer positively to Dawood's rhetorical question: 'Will the real Pakistani woman please stand up?' According to Dawood, it is the middle and lower-middle class urban woman—still a minority compared with the vast majority of illiterate poor women toiling in the villages without much recompense and consequently most victimized by patriarchal customs—on whose shoulders lies the responsibility of forging a path to empowerment and a 'responsible, fulfilled life'. The state of the rest of Pakistani womanhood, described as 'the apathy of the privileged few', contrasted with the 'impotence of the many' (98 per cent!)—removes them from Dawood's consideration as even remotely-possible representatives of a grass-roots feminism.

According to a UNDP report in 1999, cited by Dawood, Pakistan was second from the bottom of 102 countries with respect to Gender Empowerment. The development agency described

> a strong 'inside/outside' dichotomy in Pakistan, where women are restricted to the 'inside' space of home and household, embodied in the tradition of veiling. This restricts women's access to education, employment, training opportunities and social services.

This ideology of the 'home'—imbricated within the nationalist rhetoric of the 'motherland' in which women's roles as mothers and wives are confined to the domestic space which provides a secure haven for men who must fight to preserve the 'honor' of their motherland—is being challenged, according to Dawood, by the large number of women from the middle classes who are entering the work force in the late-twentieth and early twenty-first century. She stipulates:

> Women who one might have previously considered unsuitable for white collar work—perhaps because they spoke only in Urdu and wore the traditional hijab, kameez, shalwar, are now undergoing a metamorphosis. Thrust out of the kitchen and into the workforce—partly out of necessity, partly out of desire—these middle class soldiers are silently revolutionising the face of the Pakistani female. With increasing exposure to western ideas through the internet, television and print media, as well as access to education, middle-class women are pushing Pakistan up the Gender Development Index. (2005)

Here, modernity, in contradistinction from 'tradition', embodied in the practice of veiling, is equated with women's freedom from the confines of the 'veil' of 'home and household'. Thus, women's liberation is explained as an effect of exposure to western modernity, via forms of global communication such as the internet, print and visual media. Once again, it seems, we are thick in the middle of the old modernity/tradition, secularism/Islamism debate, facing the limits of a transnational feminism which privileges the ideology of individual human rights within a western liberal humanist framework which passes itself off as a universal norm against which to judge the 'progress' of nations. What such an ideology fails to recognize is the contingent nature of individual rights and 'freedom'—in this case,

those of middle-class Pakistani women who are freeing themselves of the shackles of home only to fall into another kind of servitude—that of global capitalism—with smiling faces which, one could argue, are an example of false consciousness when it is clear that conditions of employment are far from ideal.

While a study conducted by PILER in 2003 (quoted in Dawood, 2005) revealed that bringing home a paycheck did not necessarily translate into increased or equal decision-making at home, more and more women of the middle and lower middle classes say it has enriched their lives. Twenty-five year old Zenubia Qureishi, who works for a leading call centre in Karachi, is a case in point. Even though the demands of her job include working nights, she is one of the many girls on staff who comprise 22 per cent of the labour force willing to take night shifts. She says:

> The job not only makes you a good customer support executive, but also a better person. I have become more sharp and punctual . . . I also earn more than an MBA grad which is a fantastic reason to show up at night with a smile on your face!

Discussing the imbrication of ideologies of gender, class, ethnicity, nationalism and religion as constitutive of the post-colonial nation-state with my students at Government College University, I saw that while the notion of false consciousness was acceptable as a heuristic device in deconstructing these ideologies, the notion of nation nevertheless remained amazingly resistant to such deconstruction, along with the role of religion, in defining that nation as a site of resistance to western cultural, economic, and political hegemony. Thus, while the example of the call-center employee showing up for work with a grateful smile on her face in the middle of the night elicited sympathy for her and other 'dupes of the system', my female students vociferously defended their decision to wear the hijab as a personal or individual choice, based on their understanding of Islam and its code of conduct and dress for women. They proclaimed:

> We are neither dupes of religion, nor of western modernity . . . We are proud to be Muslim women, and Pakistanis at that, in touch with our decolonized identities, finally rid of western values.

That the very notion of Muslim woman may be a mediated construct in the service of a masculinist, patriarchal nation-state, was not a thought seriously considered or debated by my students. Farhat Hashmi's much-taped and touted sermon, 'Men are "Qawwam" over Women' (loosely translated as men are superior/have power over women), was seen not as anti-feminist, but rather, a close reading of the Quranic text which didn't deny women equal rights, but simply exhorted men to be the guardians and care-takers of women. What was wrong with that?

The global context within which the views of people like Farhat Hashmi have taken shape is not really grasped by the dars-going women who are in fact following in the footsteps of young Muslim men and women growing up in Europe and the USA who have become obsessed with the hijab as a marker of Muslim female identity to the

exclusion of all other issues. As usual, the hijab emphasizes the behavior of women, not of men, and in focusing their energies on it, Pakistani dars-going followers of Farhat Hashmi not only signal their acceptance of the misogynism that would reduce woman to her body, but also divert their attention from the real problems faced by Pakistani women, according to Simi Kamal. Such problems include, though are not limited to: 'death in the marital home, usurped inheritance, honour killings, trafficking of women, violence against women and sexual harassment'. Kamal (2001) further delineates her view that

> An alarming impact of dars is that, while getting a sisterhood of shared outings and uniform-style dressing, educated women are being persuaded to accept unequal relationships between men and women present in Pakistani society as 'Quranic'. This way we will continue to strengthen a major injustice in our society.

Clearly, the problems faced by a large percentage of Pakistani women are not the same as those faced by Muslim women growing up in western countries. The former face a host of issues where the role and impact of Islam on women's lives is actually subordinate to other potent forces, such as the

> desire of men to maintain and save 'face' (around which the different 'honour' codes of different parts of Pakistani society are built), tribal and feudal power structures, and the sanctity of the joint family system, to name a few. (Kamal, 2001, p. 3)

The latter, on the other hand, face discrimination as marginal 'others' within largely secular, western societies. No wonder sartorial 'choices' become signifiers of identity and thus assertive gestures of religious solidarity with others of the same faith, particularly in the wake of 9/11. In other words, the hijab in the west, becomes symbolic of the home-space which has been dislodged in the exilic existence Muslim migrants to the west face in their daily lives. In Islamic nation-states such as Pakistan, however, the ideologies of 'home' and 'nation' are dovetailed with that of a globally resurgent Islamism to divert attention of the populace from the neo-colonial policies and its attendant problems faced by the putatively 'post' colonial nation-state; in the process these intertwined ideologies have further curtailed women's rights under the guise of adopting a religiously 'correct' identity, one that by equating veiled women with the moral fabric of society hopes to save the nation from the moral depravity of western influences. The multiple ironies here are mind-boggling: President Musharraf, in his bid to remain in power, and 'save' Pakistan from the wrath of the current anti-Muslim US government, has cracked down on Muslim extremism through his platform of 'Enlightened Moderation'. He has thrown leaders of Islamic extremist factions in jail; shut down fundamentalist 'madrassas' from whence many jihadists who fought alongside the Taliban were recruited; formed a Ministry of Women's Affairs and allocated 33 per cent of seats in Parliament to women. Yet, he has done nothing to dismantle the discriminatory laws against women and religious minorities passed by the martial law dictatorship of Zia-ul Haque (well, his own government is another such dictatorship!). His much-touted land reforms

notwithstanding, the feudal stranglehold in the rural and tribal areas remains as strong as ever; consequently, so-called honour-killings (karo-kari) and other heinous crimes against women such as cutting off their noses when they are suspected of illicit behavior, continue to go unpunished. As Shimaila Dawood points out,

> Many continue to be abused, beaten, raped, and killed—with the tacit consent of governments unwilling to take on their cause.

And Musharraf's government, for all its philosophy of Enlightened Moderation, is no exception.

The discursive conditions for Islamism in Pakistan, then, are rooted both within a superficial anti-modernity resulting from anger at western imperialism pre and post-9/11, and a religious revivalism aimed at strengthening so-called traditional values perceived to be under attack by the encroachment of westernization and globalization. Under such conditions it is indeed nothing short of heroic that women's rights groups gathered under the umbrella organization of WAF (Women's Action Forum) have fashioned a secular vocabulary of individual rights to protect the dignity and lives of Pakistani women. If, in the name of tradition linked with religion, Muslim women of Pakistan are subjected to rape and mutilation; to Qisas and Diyat laws of Shariah (whereby a woman can be given as a peace offering to a family whose son has been killed by her tribe or family); and whose legal testimony has been rendered as equal to half that of a man under the obscene Hudood Ordinances; who can be accused and punished for adultery and fornication when in fact she has been raped; then, it is indeed crucial to appropriate western Enlightenment concepts of a secular liberal humanism for a feminist platform based on universal human rights. Perhaps, even more importantly, it is crucial to insert a wedge between tradition and modernity, secularism and Islamism. Condoning killing, raping and maiming women in the name of some Islamic code of justice is nothing but a cover for millennia-old tribal traditions overwritten by feudalism. The link between Islam and Tradition thus must be severed. Similarly, modernity, secularism and the west are not necessarily synonymous. New theorizations of Islamic modernity and a secular Islam are the need of the day. Perhaps secular Pakistani feminists and their Islamist agonists are two faces of the same coin in the global economy, both pushing the limits of transnational feminist theory.

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