

The Silencing of Eve

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Abstract

Eve's journey from the Qur'an to modern day Islam has been a tumultuous one. Through this sometimes violent journey we find Eve avowed to have been recognized as parallel in her creation to man but now resides in an altered state of silence. Words defining who she is or who she may become were all created and understood yet devoid of her input. It is up to the world and Muslim women to understand where this silencing came from and its attendant affect on women within the Islamic community; thus allowing Eve an equal voice.

The Silencing of Eve

When I took the honors seminar class I wrote a comparative paper on Pakistan incorporating how Muslim women were viewed and treated today versus yesterday. Back then I felt as though I had opened a Pandora's Box with regards to the immense violence that still to this day continues to be perpetrated against Muslim women, all in the name of the word *honor*. The definition of that word within the Islamic patriarchal society was determined solely by men with all its associated consequences, thus forging a perception which creates conflict for women. The dichotomy it created in my mind was that it sets women up. A mere assumption of guilt by any male member of society concerning some infraction of a woman's honor is all it takes to place a woman in the formidable position of having to prove her own innocence. During this façade of justice all extremes of violence could and would be used against her – even to the point of murder. In the end it would be a woman's word against a man's, and a woman's word is not equivalent to that of a man's in court. Somehow, this was esteemed as a favorable outcome even if, as in most cases, the woman was innocent of the stated charges. What is more astonishing is the fact that the events I related in my H100 paper were recent crimes enacted during this millennia -- not centuries ago -- and all for the sake of *honor*. Within the Islamic judicial system it is considered intolerable and shameful to be a woman who brings even alleged dishonor to any member of society. Therefore, the eradication of the taint from society is necessary, and murder is often sanctioned. In addition, men who commit heinous acts against women including rapists, murderers, and abusers often enjoy impunity within this same legal system due to their male gender. It would appear that men and women were not only different, but they were unequal in Sharī'a Law. This inequality has been created by patriarchally

interpreted Hadiths which have not only been indoctrinated into Muslim society but used as a foundation for the many crimes perpetrated against women.

While this disparity of women appeared foreign to me, at the same time it drew my curiosity into further research. Not only foreign to me, I was amazed there was a predilection of justification towards the male sector of society regarding the individuals committing these atrocities, often with no apparent attention to or outward display of remorse. In fact, the behaviors are even lauded. It was at that point in my research that I felt that these distinctive acts of violence appeared to be more cultural than religious in nature. My current research led me down a different path, as I began to realize that within the Islamic communities the definitions regulating society's actions towards women were actions of control and were instituted by the patriarchally enlightened. Then I watched *The Stoning of Soraya* and noted the blatant *silencing* within the cultural context. My heart broke. It is the educated that apply meaning to words whether to free, to bind, or to make others' voices inaudible amidst the noise.

The education that would help eradicate this silencing is in many cases denied to the very women it would unbind. At present, it is the male sector of Muslim society that are the most likely to receive an education and it is the female sector that is often denied this opportunity. Women are generally viewed as commodities therefore their educational and employment opportunities are often limited and controlled by men. The vision of this handicap was recognized by Mortenson's (Israelsen-Hartley, 2009) oft quoted African proverb: "If you educate a boy, you educate an individual. Educate a girl, and you educate a community" (Deseret News). If this education that could unbind women belonged only to the male sector of society then it seemed only natural to look through the male lens to see not only how this glimpse of Eve became crippling but also silencing to women.

Therefore, I decided to look to Eve's journey from the Qur'an to modern day Islam which has been a tumultuous one with many diverse images. It seems the road for Islamic women has been paved with controversy. Beginning with the destruction of Hadiths that had been narrated by A'ishah (Muhammad's favorite wife) after the Battle of the Camel, continuing onward to the patriarchal exegesis of Eve in Hadith's which are designed to generate an atmosphere of violence toward women. In order for her to have been silenced -- she had to have existed in some former state. She had to have been recognized and had a powerful voice that needed to be quelled. Silencing is a hiding or the muting of an action such that it cannot be announced abroad, thus lending power to its enforcer. To mute someone is to take away her voice, a woman's ability to be recognized. The evaluation of the written Word (scriptural content) can be used to perform such an action as it can be used to create realities for women that can be oppressive. *Words* can function as the foundation for silencing a woman's narrative. Those same *words* can become complicated and misinterpreted to favor one factor of society over another. Words can define either the moment we are in or they can define who we are, as well as the definitive notion of who we are to become as they push us to reach for that qualitative meaning. Words matter. Ideas can change a culture. Therefore, it is up to the world - - and Muslim women - - to understand where *silencing* came from and the affect it has on them within the Islamic community.

Mahmood (2005) stated that "it is the supposition that women Islamist supporters are pawns in a grand patriarchal plan, who if freed from their bondage, would naturally express their instinctual abhorrence for the traditional Islamic morés used to enchain them" (p. 1-2). It is not my intent to denigrate patriarchal societies, nor is it to engender suspicion with regards to the order of such a religious society as Islam. My personal religious beliefs are patriarchal in their foundation which enhances my understanding of such; thus it is not my purpose to propose a removal of Islamic women's religious identity. Instead, I perceive a

patriarchal egalitarian voice which purports to herald to one and all the equity of men and women within the scriptural foundations of Islam. Yet for all intents and purposes the cultural society of Islam appears to be in direct contradiction with those tenets, and this contradictory stance is supported by the actions of many of the male members of that society. Because the Islamic belief system plays such an integral part in the people's day to day activities, words become a powerful source of communication, and the interpretation of those words by religious leaders formulates the direction of its culture.

No more powerful form exists for Muslims than the rich vocabulary contained in the Koran. Daily life is intricately intertwined within it. Laws based on that text have been decreed that perpetuate the weltanschauung that has become the cultural foundation of everyday Islam (Kamali, 2005, para. 1). For Islam, God (or Allah) is the creator of language. Thus, His writings form a communion with, as well as help His people become familiar with, His will, thereby moving His people to action. When those in power use the constructs of God's language to oppress others, then that language becomes a binding power, and creates a prison for believers. It also lays a foundation ripe for corruption. Since the Koran is holy script, my first question was whether there was a foundational or ideological theory regarding Eve and her state of being. Since, most of Christianity views Eve as the seductress who brought about the Fall I wondered if this same line of thinking was pervasive in Islam. If so, that belief would therefore contribute to an oppressive mindset towards women. Exegetics or the science of searching for hidden meaning in texts is essential to recognizing those areas or modes of silencing. Therefore, how text is interpreted influences what we think, how we act, and the way we communicate with others. In the Islamic world, text creates the objectification of women through a patriarchal exegesis and it lends support to its manifestation in the form of violence within the lives of many Muslim women. The Koran is not only holy script but it is an instructive text. It is used as well within the Muslim

community as a guide to one's daily activities. As Lawall (2002) stated, it is considered to be "an earthly duplicate of a divine Koran that exists in paradise . . . Like God, it was not created but exists for all eternity" (p.1426). Because the text of the Koran is viewed as words from God, its doctrinal principles and ordinances displace man's written words in Muslim society. In other words, out of respect for the divinity of the Koran, man's law will be overridden by God's law within Muslim communities. Thus, the scriptural written word carries great weight and is fundamental to the development of one's view pertaining to the roles of men and women. It offers guidance for how one should act within society in general and in family settings -- it gives meaning to life. This is borne out by Kamali (2005) who stated that the "Qur'an devotes greater attention to subjects such as marriage, divorce, and inheritance than it does to any other legal topic" (para. 1). Next to the Koran as sacred text lie the Hadiths. These are texts which include the things that the prophet Muhammad said and did. Comparatively speaking, they are somewhat similar to the writing of the New Testament by the apostles after the death of Christ. The Hadiths were written by respected Muslim leaders, some who were close to the prophet, about his life and sayings after his death. As Shahab Ahmed (2002) explains, "Hadith literature (often called in Western scholarship "Muslim tradition") is understood to be the repository of the *sonna* (normative conduct; pl. *sonan*) of the Prophet, which is regarded as second in authority only to the Koran as a source of Divine truth" (para. 1). According to Dr. Godlas (2003), "Since Islamic legal scholars were utilizing hadith as an adjunct to the Qur'an in their development of the Islamic legal system, it became critically important to have reliable collections of hadith" (para. 1). Therefore, Hadiths are important not only as a sacred or legal text, but they would be a primary text to examine for patterns of attitude that have been established within communities with regards to women. It is within those communities that governing bodies called *jirgas* (tribal councils) carry out Koranic perceptions discerned from the Hadiths.

Having had the opportunity to attend multiple churches during my teen years I am very familiar with the general view of how mother Eve is perceived within the general religious community. That vision is often one of contempt, for she is considered to be the person who brought the downfall of humankind by partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. This act is deemed as one of disobedience and is blamed for all the woes of mankind. It is assumed by most religions that the human fallen state is due to Eve and her lack of control within the Garden of Eden. Therefore, I chose to explore the Islamic scriptural texts of the Koran first to ascertain its position on Eve's role with regards to the Fall. To do that, I turned to the Koranic scholars.

Although it is accepted by ordinary Muslims, Hassan (2002) disputed the Yahwist's belief of Adam as God's "first creation and that Eve was made from Adam's rib" (p. 192). She stated that it has no grounding in the Koran and that it is basically a myth. She elaborated that nowhere in the Koran does it state Adam gave up a rib for Eve (Hassan, 2002, p. 192), and because the "Koran makes no distinction between the creation of man and woman" they are representative of humanity in general. Since they are described in egalitarian terms, Hassan (2002) proposed that this fallacy was "incorporated in Hadith literature during the early centuries of Islam" (p. 193). She concluded that the Hadiths that support this theory are "in opposition to the Koranic accounts about human creation" (Hassan, 2002, p. 195), and since Muslim scholars believe that interpretative contradictions to the Koran are not authentic they should be rejected on that basis (Hassan, 2002, p. 195). She postulated that in the Koran, man and woman are on equal footing as they were created equally by God; therefore, one is not privileged over the other. Hassan (2002) expressed a desire for the Koran to be used as the basis for the Hadiths rather than patriarchal inferences. She indicated that the inferiority with which Islamic society views women in regards to men does not come from, and is not supported by God in the Koran (p. 195).

It would appear from this analysis that Adam and Eve were created with equal footing and one was not placed above the other. This establishes that Allah seems to be no respecter of persons with equity for all of His creations. In the story line itself Hassan (2002) pointed out that “there is no ‘Fall’ or Original Sin in the Koran” (p.198). However, she clearly identified misogynistic attitudes that have been within Islam. Based upon Hassan’s analysis, it appears that within the creation story, Adam and Eve were equally susceptible to temptation when having to make the choice between good and evil, thus awakening them to their mortality and she feels that this was the actual moral dilemma portrayed in the story. Supporting Hassan’s claim, Dodge (2010) stated “in Islam, there is no concept of original sin. The first human beings made a mistake and asked for forgiveness, and God showed them mercy” (para. 2). Thus, it would appear that men and women are equal in the Koran. Further, as Dodge explained, they are complements to each other because they “were both created from the same origin, equal but not identical” (“Equal in the Eyes of God,” para. 3) and mercy was extended to both equitably. It becomes clear that Eve existed in the Koran as an equal to Adam, and both were equally culpable with regards to the eating of the forbidden fruit. Her punishment was equal to his. Regarding this instance Hassan (2002) claimed that by partaking of the Tree, they perpetrated *zulm*. Hassan described *zulm* as acting “in such a way as to transgress the proper limit and encroach upon the right of some other person” (p. 197). Adam and Eve used their own agency and intellect to make the choice as to whether they should partake of the fruit of the Tree. This choice placed both in a position of being equally responsible for their own choices, as well as the consequences that come with those choices. However, all the issues of a fallen state or immoral sexuality that plague Christianity continue to perpetuate “the myth of feminine evil” among Muslims as well (Hassan, 2002, p. 198).

Within Islam, the fact that women are dependent upon the male members of their family for maintaining social honor and that they are not autonomous beings means they are vulnerable to and not participatory agents in interpretation of religious text. The analysis of the language of Hadiths supports “a system of signification through which [women] are produced and interpolated” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 19). It is Hadiths such as those examined in this paper that form the subservient woman preferred within patriarchal Islamic society. Hadiths have been used as a foundation to build the temporal and spiritual attributes that the Islamic patriarchal society embodies, along with their attitudes about women. The desired characteristics can be defined, controlled, and cultivated while girls are young, thus refining the final product. This leaves no room for independence, but rather women are required to look to men to interpret their selfhood. Hassan’s (2002) expertise brings to light the fact that “the Koran does not create a hierarchy in which men are placed above women, nor does it pit men against women in an adversary relationship” and that “they are created as equal creatures” (p. 200). She claimed that it is the continuing popularity of certain Hadiths that promote the devaluing of women. Examples she provided include the following two.

[The Prophet] said, “After me I have not left any affliction [sic; “temptation” would better render the Arabic *fitnah*] more harmful to men than women. Ibn ‘Abbās reported that Allah’s Messenger may peace be upon him said: “I had a chance to look into Paradise and found that the majority of the people were poor and I looked into the Fire and there I found the majority constituted by women.

Abū Sa’īd Khudrī reported that Allah’s Messenger may peace be upon him said: “The world is sweet and green (alluring) and verily Allah is going to install you as viceregent in it in order to see how you act. So avoid the allurements of women: verily the first trial for the people of Isra’īl was caused by women. (Hassan, 2002, p. 199)

These Hadiths clearly place the burden of sinfulness between men and women as solely the woman's responsibility. This allows men to create realities for women based on certain patriarchal conceptualizations of the Koran and then to actively project these onto women. The temptation spoken of in these Hadiths is the embodiment of woman and suggests that because women are temptresses they will be found more abundantly in Hell's fire. Thus, from birth, women enter the role of temptress placing their species almost parallel with Shaytaan (Satan) who is mankind's tempter. On the one hand, it would be tantamount to drinking poison for a man to enter into temptation with a woman yet men are required to marry these temptresses in order to perpetuate the species. This barrier would seem to make the opposite sex appear less attractive to those seriously seeking Paradise or at best place handicaps on their relationships with women. The speaker in each of these verses is male gendered as they are reported by a religiously authoritative Muslim male, who feels compelled to warn Muslim men with regards to Muslim women. These verses dramatize the eternal conflict between men and women, that mankind has faced for centuries, that of submission of one to the other.

No equality is represented in these Hadiths with regards to sexual sins of men and women or humankind's sexuality. The language places the greater burden with regards to illicit sexual acts upon the female, due to her allurements as a temptress, thereby alluding to her ability to entrap a man in sin. It also places the male as *viceregent* setting him up as woman's ruler acting as her administrative deputy further devaluing her. This also debases her as a member of society. It usurps her ability to think for herself and places little value on her thoughts or creative ability. Not only do we get the sense of allurements, but there is a pervasive feeling that the woman somehow has the innate desire to ruin man at all costs even that of Hell. As Aschkensay (1986) pointed out, in ancient times woman became enveloped not only in a legal system but in

a certain social and cultural ambience, not defined by the law, in which her femininity—her ability to arouse desire in man, and her reproductive powers—was regarded with a mixture of awe and jealousy. This resulted in a situation where the woman's sexuality was both guarded and exploited, and where she was often seen as a being tyrannized by her own anatomy, who had to pay the price not only for her own excesses but for those she may have aroused in the male. (p. 109)

This bears out in avoiding the seduction of women because they have the capacity to cause man's downfall simply due to their feminine allurements. This gives women great power, which must be subdued or broken by men, in order to keep men from falling into Hell's pit along with women. It then allows for women to be exploited by men sexually as men can escape judgment or a call to repentance because the fault lies not with them but with the uncovered female anatomy. Muslim women must be guarded, submissive and hidden in order to keep Muslim men the world over safe.

The allusion to the Fire being inhabited by a greater number of women is a warning to man to beware of a woman's charm, because she has a greater natural tendency toward sin than man does. This would clearly indicate that the female gender would require much stricter surveillance than their male counterparts, thus restricting their ability to move about society freely. It would leave the door wide open for stronger punishments directed toward women to keep them in line in order to try to break their sinful nature. This creates an atmosphere of dominion over them, because if women are more sinful by nature then why would men place them in charge of anything of importance? Doing so could lead all of society astray just by the nature of their qualification as temptress. It would advance the need for harsher treatment because females are distinguished as being endowed with the ability to produce weightier trials than males.

This discourse has a paralyzing influence upon women and is almost a discounting of their spiritual nature and eternal future. The fact that in both verses they are mentioned with such negative connotations negates their existence in the eternities other than where they are being punished. It follows suit that men are in abundance in Paradise for the majority of the women have been relegated to the eternal pit of fire known as Hell. This gives an advantage to men based on the notion that they have a much deeper spirituality than women do. The message from this particular Hadith is definitely not one of equality. It implies that women will have to work much harder than men because they have a character deficit of being more evil than men. This projection of a greater capacity toward evil onto women than men gives the impression that one would be better off to avoid the female gender or she may be the cause of man to become a part of that fiery pit. So before a woman experiences life in any form, her destiny is altered due to an exegesis that places her on an uneven footing. Therefore she is predestined toward an evil that she is powerless to change unless man intervenes to save her by submission. It suppresses her ability to change the course of her existence significantly, before she has even started life, unless some way is found to equalize authority between genders in Islamic society. Unfortunately, a propensity toward equalization is not the disposition of much of the patriarchal Islamic society at present.

In the second Hadith one observes that the earth is personified as being sweet as well as alluring which gives the earth a provocative attribute. There is a hidden comparative to women and the earth with an evident warning to mankind that while the two are sweet, green, they are also alluring-almost sensual. A visual sense of the earth is seen in regards to the word green, with the earth portrayed as young, as well as the youthfulness of the woman. Who has not walked the green pastures of the countryside and not felt drawn to the beauty of the scene that lay before them. This powerful interpretation provides the earth with sensuality and the capabilities of earth [woman] alluring and seducing man- -the cause of his

transgression. He is warned of the harmfulness of this eminent danger of allurements that might trap him in the same way that triggered man's descent. In scriptural society Babylon is representative of the world as well as a symbol of worldly wickedness. If taken along these lines, then the world which is sweet and green in addition to the allurements of women, both become seductions that man as *viceregent* must conquer. The reference to the color green also makes one think of a young newly-grown plant and could also allude to a woman's childhood innocence or her youth and beauty. This would be a further snare for man to overcome in order to avoid being lured by her charms, thus facing the same errors of the first trial of the people of Isra'il. There is a sense of duality and power incorporated in woman. First, she is considered as having childhood innocence, and then second, she is afforded the mature characteristics of a temptress with full capability to overwhelm and cause the downfall of all mankind. Comparing woman's sensuality to that first trial also places all of her actions and motivations on a serious level, one that could affect mankind unless all men fail to overcome the allurements of sexual vices as well as the duplicity of woman. Allowing for woman to appear treacherous and false, for surely they must be, as they trick mankind into sexual subversiveness. In this sense the woman takes on the responsibility for a man's choice, as he is absolved for surely she beguiled him. Since, in many religions the "world" is comparative to Babylon which is a dangerous allurements for man, once he enters or participates then it becomes his downfall. Once a Muslim man has entered the world, his Babylon is Eve, and he must not only control her but also his participation in life with her.

How do these misrepresentations continue to pervade and affect various aspects of Muslim women in society disempowering them? The Council of Islamic Ideology was created in 1973 during General Zia ul Haque's governance. It was this council in Pakistan that drafted what became known as the Hudood Ordinances using the Koran and Sunnahs as sources for the laws (Kennedy, 1987, p. 1). General Zia's imposition of Hudood was to gain

control of women's sexual activities. *Zia/Zina* is a part of the Hudood Ordinances. These ordinances relate to any extramarital sex -- either adultery or fornication -- both of which are forbidden in Islam. Instead of protecting the victim, these laws take someone who has been raped and moves them from victim to an accused status, thereby creating a system that encourages and supports the exploitation of women. For example, when a Muslim woman presents herself to authorities as a victim of a rape crime under S Sharī'ah/Hudood law and decides to file a claim, she must carry the burden of proof. The woman will be placed into custody and have to spend her time in jail where the Herculean task of proving her innocence is placed squarely upon her shoulders. Evidence must be brought forth by the woman in the form of four truthful Muslim men in good standing, who will stand as witnesses of the aforementioned crime, but they must have witnessed the actual penetration. Consequently, the conviction of rape is a very difficult procedure to procure given the obstacles placed before Muslim women. If she fails to give evidence of rape, then the crime automatically converts to *Zina* and the woman will be charged with either adultery or fornication both of which carry heavy penalties.

Additionally, in Islam when tribal clans feel that they have been wronged or dishonored, it is usually women who are used as bargaining chips for damage control. It is these same local tribunals that provide the application for religious interpretation of women's behavior in daily life. Such was the case of Muktar Mai (2006). She describes her experience with retribution in the opening chapter of her memoir. Her family status was that of a lower caste, the Gujar clan in the village of Meerwala. Unbeknownst to Mai, she was selected to be the sacrificial lamb to the Mastois clan. All she knew was that as a woman it was compulsory that she present herself at the local *jirga* (governing body) in order to beg forgiveness on behalf of her family for some fabricated charges leveled against her twelve year old brother (Mai, 2006, p. 2).

The others are too young to do this. Your husband has granted you a divorce, you have no children, you teach the Koran. You are a respectable woman! It's long after sunset, but until now I've been told very little of what caused this serious dispute today. The men of the jirga, our village council, have been meeting for several hours now, and only they know why I must appear before the tribunal. (Mai, 2006, p.2)

Mai did not realize that as she left to meet with the jirga, she was on her way to serve as the token of revenge for a trumped up charge by the Mastois clan and that her life would be changed forever. Most of the jirga had left after a heated debate with the Mastois. When Mai arrives the Mastois' clan are the majority and they control the jirga's verdict. Mai discovers that according to the negotiations of the jirga for "the councilors themselves have fixed upon a gang rape as a means to what they call their 'honor justice'" is that she, Mukhtar Mai, will be gang raped as retribution to the Mastois clan (Mai, 2006, p. 9). Little did Mai know that her initial perceptions were on target with respect to her lack of knowledge regarding the situation she now finds herself facing. Because the messages contained in the Hadiths place women's value as negligible they are not taken into confidence at these councils. They are valued so little that their testimonies do not count in court. Mai's experience mimics that of thousands of Muslim women who must endure the crime of rape plus have the humiliation of a justice system that deems women invisible. There are also many women throughout Pakistan as well as the worldwide Muslim community who are illiterate and totally unaware of their individual civil rights. Her willingness to go forth against all obstacles makes her a hero to women and a model to emulate. Mai taught the Koran because she had memorized it verbally and that was the method she used to teach the children in her village. Unfortunately Mai suffered the same fate as that of many Muslim women in that she could not read or write. Illiterate though she may be, she did realize that her personal fight became a symbol to other women who found themselves in similar plights. To put into perspective just how brave Mai

is, remember that in Islam under Zia/Shari'ah any woman who reports a rape or accuses a man of rape is automatically considered guilty of the charge of Zina/adultery if she cannot produce four Muslim male witnesses who can or are willing to attest to penetration. Zina is punishable by stoning to death. For female Muslims who are victims of rape these written laws are a way of silencing them. Therefore as Mai points out, "Men have the monopoly on vengeance, which passes through violence inflicted upon women" (Mai, 2006, pp.19).

Girls pay a heavy price with regards to men's perception of rape within Muslim society. A bride child at the age of ten, Nujood's (2010) marriage took place because of the rape of her older sister, Mona. Mona was home alone when a thirty year old neighbor decided to enter the house and rape her. "Informed of the business, the village sheikh married us hastily, before rumors could spread from house to house and valley to valley" (Ali, 2010, p. 137). Mona ended up being a victim twice, once, in the brutality of the rape itself then, again as she was forced to marry her rapist as settlement to prevent the stain of dishonor. Since an accusation of rape without proof automatically translates into Zina, had Mona reported the incident to authorities, she most likely would have been charged with Zina. She would have either committed suicide to avoid the stain of dishonor or languished in jail for years awaiting sentencing. While in jail her likelihood of further abuse and rape by the police would have been high. Later in the story we find that Mona's elder sister, Jamila has been caught with Mona's rapist husband, Mohammad. Both Jamila and Mohammad end up in prison awaiting the outcome of being accused of Zina. Then Nujood's father, Aba is fearful of losing Nujood to the same fate as Mona has experienced therefore; he decides to marry Nujood off to a thirty year old man. She is just ten years old yet she is already experiencing the repercussions of a patriarchal society and its perceptions of Hadith. It is because of the price of honor that Nujood's father wanted to protect his daughter's virginity along with the possibility of rape. To prevent these possibilities, Aba chooses to offer ten year old Nujood in marriage thus

ensuring that she is a virgin at the time of her marriage. The situation is filled with irony as Aba tries to prevent Nujood from being raped by offering her as a child bride instead. Then through the consummation of her marriage she is repeatedly raped by her husband. It is not just male oppressors who disadvantage these girls, as Nujood's own mother-in-law did nothing to assist her as she cried out but rather became one of her oppressors. Nujood (2006) stated she did not agree with her father who defended his actions by commenting "that, after all, the Prophet married Aïsha when she was only nine years old" (p. 162). This is an example of perceptions that become religious law which circumvent women's autonomy and keep them bound in servitude to oppression. The Islamic culture's approach to rape are a result of patriarchal interpretations which in turn have a misogynistic affect on women's lives as they struggle to understand why they are being bartered off like cattle.

Soraya's (Mozhan Marnò) story attempts to break that silence in a world that lacks the ability to truly comprehend the evil not of their own making that surrounds some Muslim women. Soraya would not give permission for her husband to take on another wife so he falsely accused her of adultery. In this way he could push for Soraya to be stoned which will then give him the opportunity to marry his fourteen year-old future bride. Stoning is the punishment that has been established in the Hadith for adultery between two married people (Dannoun, n.d. para. 4). As Ebrahim, one of the village leaders, cross-examined Soraya he pointed out that "When a man accuses his wife, she has to prove her innocence. That is the law. On the other hand, if a woman makes an accusation against her husband, she has to produce proof" (Sahebjam, 1990, p. 73). Thus the burden of proof for either situation is placed upon the woman; whether to prove her innocence or her husband's guilt. The double standard created for women who not only have to bear the burden of proof but the punishment as well for fabricated accusations is overwhelming.

In their book entitled *Half the Sky*, Kristoff and WuDunn (2009) questioned whether Islam is misogynistic. They acknowledged that in the “countries where women are held back and subjected to systematic abuses such as honor killings and genital cutting, a very large proportion [of the population] are predominantly Muslim” (pp. 149). Pointing out that most Muslims around the world do not believe in these practices, yet the fact remains that where these customs are performed there reside high populations of Muslims. Both Kristoff and WuDunn suggested that the attitude that is displayed within these Muslim countries should not have the blame laid at the doorsteps of religion, but rather there is a cultural basis to them. But, the authors agreed, religion is often cited by those performing these acts of oppression to justify their violence. In the early years of the Islamic religion, it is purported to have been a boon to women giving them rights and respect not found in the Christian world. However; with the passage of time it is evident that “conservative Islam has barely budged” leaving it frozen in an archaic world view of the seventh-century (Kristoff and WuDunn, 2009, p. 149).

Kristoff and WuDunn (2009) noted that in Westerners’ attempts to empathize, it is often done “in a way that leaves [Muslim women] uncomfortable, even angry” (p. 154). It appears that many of the female activists that I researched dislike it when Westerners question the inequality of Muslim women because they feel that Western women come across as patronizing or miss “the complexity of gender roles in the Islamic world (Kristoff & WuDunn, 2009, p. 154). The main focal point of Western feminists seems to be that of Muslim women’s clothing which they feel is representative of victimization and oppression of women, especially with regards to veiling. It has never been my attempt, amidst my current research to delve too deeply into the wearing of the veil. I have noticed that many of the female activists, such as Barazangi and Mahmood; appear also to resent Western feminists attempts at defining their seeming plight of oppression. These Muslim women discern that the attention by the West is more focused on women’s clothing and the ideology

of freeing them from the veil, thus altogether missing the true heart of the matter regarding the veil. Many Muslim women wear the veil by choice as a virtuous practice, as Mahmood's study bears out in *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminine Subject*. "They [Western feminists] draw, therefore, an ineluctable relationship between the norm (modesty) and the bodily form it takes (the veil) such that the veiled body becomes the necessary means through which the virtue of modesty is both created and expressed" Mahmood, 2005, pp. 23). Yet, these are voices of women who do not seem to be in a position in which they are forced to veil. Therefore, I cannot help but wonder if these same educated women were stripped of their choice and forced to veil would their discourse be similar?

The veil does have some mention in the Koran and is not always seen as a patriarchal perception of control. But there are continuing disagreements as to the actual application of the veil as well as the reasons for the verses. Its use is mentioned in several Hadiths such as the following example.

'O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the women of the believers to draw their cloaks ("Jalabib") veils all over their bodies (screen themselves completely except the eyes or one eye to see the way Tafseer Al-Qurtabi) that is most convenient that they should be known (as such) and not molested: and Allah is Oft-Forgiving Most Merciful." (IbnFarooq, Surah Al-Ahzaab, Verse #59)

Western society cannot malign Muslim women for an article of clothing that when worn for the right reasons embraces a sense of modesty or piety in women or that can be representative of a private dwelling of protection, if that is Muslim women's conviction toward veiling. The West may be taken aback by this attitude, because for some women the veil becomes a wall of choice in which to fence in their movement or their ability to communicate with the world at large. In some instances the claim by male authority for the veil is for the purpose of modesty, but in effect there have been circumstances where it has been shown to be used to

control. For example, Farrah Ahmedi (2005), lived in Afghanistan as a small child when the Taliban took control and made it mandatory for all the women “to wear a chadari, a baglike veil that covers a woman from head to foot” (pp. 95). That coupled with the fact that women could not go out without a man to accompany them made it extremely difficult for her and her recently widowed mother to survive.

In my own research I found this offense that Muslim women take against Western feminists about the veil to be more prevalent within articles by educated and scholarly women such as Barazangi, Mahmood, and Haghdoosti. These are women who have an intellectual background and who for all intents and purposes appear to have a choice with regards to the veil although Haghdoosti did have a short stint of forced veiling (The Punch, 2010). In my experience I found other women, often lower class, who felt the matter of veiling to be restrictive. The main reason was because for them it was not an option in which they had a choice but rather a forced enclosure restricting their activity and making them totally dependent upon men. In the documentary, *Beneath the Veil*, British journalist Sairah Shah (2001) shows the restriction felt by Muslim women in Pakistan and Afghanistan who are forced under the veil by the Taliban. Their lives are governed and defined by the Taliban who feel they hold authoritative perceptions of Islamic text with regards to women. It would appear that Muslim women do not detest the veil but rather embrace its ability to give them autonomy in men’s/stranger’s space, except when it is representative of a form of forced and violent control.

The old system cannot be replaced without offering a new system in its place. This is not something that Westerners can perform as this falls within the realms of Muslim women to solve. Western feminists can be supporters provided the problem is recognized as one Muslim feminist’s own, and that Westerners’ leave the control in their hands. Mahmood (2005) uses Lughod’s criticism of her own struggle to recognize women’s resistance as she

points to the fact that many of us are guilty of “explaining resistance and finding resisters” at the “expense of understanding the workings of power” (p. 8). When I first started this project, I felt that it was imperative that Westerners needed to be the ones to fix the problem but deeper research has led me to a different conclusion. Westerners’ have limited understanding of the faith that binds women to Islamic views and it is not up to them to perform exorcisms to strip religious conviction from Muslim women. It is incumbent upon Muslim women to find and display their own voice which they are striving to do within the scholarly community. However, that voice must reach beyond the scholarly female community for it to have an effect that will include the lifestyles of those who are not yet in a position to be able to speak for themselves or have not reached or are prevented from reaching the point of self-actualization.

Educated Muslim women found this silencing to prohibit women from freely accessing the same rights as their male counterparts. Female activists such as Mir-Hosseini (2006) contend that “patriarchal interpretations of Sharī‘a can and must be challenged at the level of *fiqh* [jurisprudence], which is nothing more than the human understanding of the divine will, that is, what we are able to understand of the Sharī‘a in this world at the legal level” (p. 633). Scholarly female activists are striving to promote an Islam that is in line with their view of justice towards women one which they also feel is supported by Koranic text. They are working towards their own exegesis that displays the egalitarianism that patriarchal versions omit. These women are going back to the original source of the Koranic texts as well as key words that have been misinterpreted to make “men ‘rulers’ over women, a hierarchy akin to the one created by the Apostle Paul and his followers in the Christian tradition, is set up in the ummah [nation, community]” (Hassan, 2002, p. 201). She contends that using the lens of the Hadith to read the Koran creates situations of understanding therefore it is imperative to go back to the original text to clear up any misunderstandings.

Women as Hassan (2002) points out “with some degree of education and awareness are beginning to realize that the interpretation of Koranic text via religion is being used as an instrument of oppression rather than as a means of liberation” (p.189). Although this realization is slowly coming to fruition among educated Muslim women throughout the world their battle appears to be insurmountable, given the general perception of the panorama of Eve that most Muslims’ have adopted. These scholars are beginning to realize that it is this patriarchal exegesis from which Islamic communities derive their legitimacy to support their oppression of women. It is also a way to actively erase them from public life. They also recognize this view is fragmenting Muslim society’s landscape regarding women and these activists are actively striving to pursue a different outcome (Hassan, 2002, p. 203).

Barazangi (2009) postulates that Muslims just like everyone else look for justice and many female activists feel this is available within the Koran. But the perception of women must be changed in the actual Hadiths and Muslim female scholars should and could help in this challenge. It is the absence of women within the leadership decision making processes that is the problem. Because it does not allow for their influence to be felt, thus creating a lopsided justice that favors the male sector of society (pp. 402-203). However, the real difficulty lies in these scholars’ ability to convince the religious leaders to re-open the exegesis of the Koran, while allowing for female involvement, such that it creates a more balanced outlook for Muslim women.

The answer also lies in the ordinary Muslim woman, such as Mukhtar Mai, whose tariqah [path] is one that is worthy of imitation. She took a violent situation and turned it around for the good of all. At one point, she stated that she was “tired of talking, of having to deal with men and their laws” (Mai, 2006, p. 74). However, she decided to avoid the path of shame and has “turned the spotlight on the condition of women” in her country as she tries to use her own spotlight to make a difference (Mai, 2006, pp. 74-75). This is a foreign area for

women who are used to being compliant. Many women do not choose the path Mai has taken instead they either accommodate their family by committing suicide or they become the end result of an honor killing. As a family feels the shame and stigma associated with these crimes, one popular way to remove the dishonor their daughter has brought upon them is to either convince her to commit suicide, or to have her killed. In a repressive society women become invisible which is how Mai describes her life before the rape that she grew up without knowing who she was. "Invisible" (Mai, 2006, p. 90).

Another factor in this dilemma is the fact that Mai's experience within the legal system made her realize that many Muslim women are illiterate, because educating a girl outside the home is considered a waste, when all she is going to become is a wife and mother. She discovered firsthand that not knowing what the policemen were writing down during her ordeal made a difference. She is right when she states that her "only brave action was to speak up even though" she "had been taught to be silent" (Mai, 2006, p.77). It was the educated people surrounding her, who were willing to help as well as the involvement of the global community that allowed Mai to be successful in her endeavors. What Mai learned is that there is a pluralistic legal system in Pakistan in regards to women that creates subjugation. While there is a court system with judicial power, it is often overridden by local religious tribal councils, such as the jirga in her case. The Koran and Hadiths are considered God's consecrated spiritual laws and they have precedence over any other form of governing. This is a brutal system for women to try to overcome because they lack the skills and education necessary to navigate or utilize this flawed system. Mai recognizes that she is a victim of illiteracy as she points out that "Aside from prayer and recitation of the Koran, that's the only education we receive. And it teaches us distrust, obedience, submission, fear, abject respect for men. It teaches us to forget ourselves" (Mai, 2006, p. 91). The Islamic court system is one in theory only, as in the end it is the men in the jirga, not the court systems,

who will decide a woman's fate, as well as her punishment with little if any interference by the judiciary system.

It was not just Mai's illiteracy that helped her decide to open up a school, where boys and girls in her village, as well as her perpetrators children, could be educated. It was the realization that even though she had memorized the Koran by heart, being uneducated placed her in a position of dependency. Mai was dependent upon educated men's reasoning and at the mercy of their understanding of Koranic judgment all of which severely limited her ability to have full autonomy. Her hope was to prevent other girls/women from enduring her same ordeal through education. Mai realizes that educating girls will eradicate ignorance and help build a cycle whereby these girls will one day want to educate their own children.

When religious language is used to justify these patriarchal structures of oppression which are inherently violent because they violate women's human dignity, the circle is complete. Use of God language to defend the oppression of women, 'this is God's will', traps women of faith. Can God truly will this violence? Many women accept what they are told passively and obediently, and thus it takes a strong woman to look out of her prison and say 'no' (Rackoczy, 2004, p. 31).

Therefore women whose education is controlled by men will always be in submission to men's will and dependent on husbands because they cannot read. When women are educated, they will then be able to read the Hadiths for themselves and have the opportunity to question and debate men's perception of Hadith's on their own terms. It will keep men from translating the practice of feminine oppression into a framework of ideational structures with a potential for realization upon women. Allowing women the opportunity to enter the arena of analysis will help eradicate the intolerant perceptions being read into the Hadiths. It is the aspect of Muslim society most resistant to social change. Rackoczy (2004) points out that "Rene Girard (1986) has analysed the intricate relationship between religion and violence. He

argues that through the process of 'mimesis' or imitation we learn what is desirable from the models of behaviour around us" (p. 30). In order for the violent patriarchal model to change women need to be allowed to participate in their own education. Educating women would bring a much needed change to Muslim communities as they teach their children the value of equality of education for all, slowly tearing down that wall of persecution one brick at a time. It is education that will allow Muslim women to retrieve Eve's voice thus un-silencing her.

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