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Domestic Violence and the American Muslim Community's Response

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Editorial

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

I am pleased to present this issue of the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*, the theme of which is Domestic Violence and the American Muslim Community's Response. The journey to producing this issue was challenging, due to the pandemic and other circumstances beyond our control. We are grateful to everyone who helped us bring this critical issue to fruition, and we thank all of you for your patience.

Identifying those concepts, relationships, and cultural traits that are compatible with Islam's ethos and universally desirable as human qualities is one of Muslims' great responsibilities. Islam is not just a religion but a civilization, a way of life that varies from one Muslim society to another. However, it is animated by a common spirit that leads to the highest quality of life for everyone, while avoiding abuses.[1]

This communal concept, known as *'amr bi al-ma'rūf wa nahīy 'an al-munkar* (enjoining the right and honorable and forbidding the wrong and dishonorable), seeks to replace oppression with justice at all social levels. This communal responsibility (*farḍ kifāya*) demands that the community prioritize the welfare of every person, especially that of the vulnerable and the oppressed. This Qur'anic principle, which preserves each person's dignity, enabled Islam to become not only functional and familiar at the local level, but also dynamically engaging in other communal levels by fostering stable Muslim identities and allowing Muslims to put down deep roots and make lasting contributions wherever its followers went.[2]

For Muslims, the Qur'an is primarily a book of guidance for humanity. As the final divinely revealed book, its messages are timeless and remain relevant because it speaks to human reality in a universal sense. The Qur'an provides practical answers and teaches that whenever human reality becomes complicated, we should go back to the basic and foundational belief and principles. The Creator, the One Who owns all knowledge and wisdom, entrusted humanity with being His representatives on earth (2:30-39). The foremost quality of mind and

[1] Mazrui, Ali. 1997. "Islamic and Western Values," *Foreign Affairs.* Vol. 76, No. 5, Sept/Oct, pp. 118-132.
[2] Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, "Islam and the Cultural Imperative." A Nawawi Foundation Paper, 2004.

character flowing from this commitment is a state of constant vigilance and self-awareness of the presence of God, the All-Knowing. *Tazkīya* (holistic purification) is the vital process of building one's *taqwā* (God-consciousness) because it represents a person's most important credential and qualification. *Tazkīya* is vital, for an individual must possess it in order to be a responsible representative on earth, one who promotes mutual cooperation, counseling, forbearance, compassion, forgiveness, help, and accountability.

The Qur'an provides a clear and comprehensive structure to preserve the family institution and its values, as well as to strengthen family ties via mutual care and mutual accountability. Sūra al-Nisā' opens with the proclamation:

> O humanity, be conscious of your Rabb (Nurturer), Who created you from a single soul (*nafs wāḥida*), and from it [of like nature] created its mate, and from the two has spread a multitude of men and women. Remain conscious of God,[3] through Whom you demand your mutual [rights] from one another, and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you). Verily, God is ever Watchful over you. (4:1)[4]

Accountability in relationships means to claim responsibility for one's words, actions, and their effects on others. This practice enables them to understand how their behaviors influence other people, after which they can devise a course of correction that helps maintain healthier and more collaborative relationships.

Not only is accountability a foundational principle in any healthy relationship because it builds self-awareness, encourages empathy, and fosters a culture of collaboration, but it is also a collaborative practice. Therefore, the family is the first place in which people should be taught, trained, and practice how to hold each other accountable. The Qur'an identifies wrong behaviors and actions and provides practical answers for dealing with them. For example, Sūra al-Nisā' teaches us how to identify such things and then examines their roots in a society that wronged and deprived the young and vulnerable, as well as widowed women, of their rightful share of their inheritance. Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) explains how to address oppression and injustice: Abū Sa'īd al-Khudrī

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[3] The meaning of (God) here is (Allah, the Creator, the Sustainer, "God has the Most Beautiful Names. So call upon Him by them," … (7:180 and 59:22-24). The capital "W" here refers to the royal We. Muslims believe "There is nothing like Him, for He 'alone' is the All-Hearing, All-Seeing" (42:11).

[4] See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961), 4:1; al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2d ed., ed. Muṣṭafā Ḥusyan Aḥmad (Cairo: Maṭbaʿat al Istiqāma, 1952), 4:1; Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya lil-Nashr, 1984), 4:1.

reported: "Whoever among you sees *munkar* (wrong, immoral), s/he must change it with his hand. If s/he is not able to do so, then with his/her tongue. If s/he is not able to do so, then with his/her heart. And that is the weakest form of faith."[5]

Muslim women of the first generation conducted a serious dialogue with the Qur'an and thus could identify the oppressive and unjust behaviors and actions directed against them. Indeed, they showed Muslims how to abolish such customs. For example, God dignified Khawla bint Tha'laba in Sūra al-Mujādila, "the woman who disputes" or "the pleading woman." God, the All Knowing, announced her complaint and included it in the Qur'an. Such a confirmation emphasizes the significance of one's personal responsibility to identify wrong behaviors and hold people accountable to assess their actions and words and to correct them.

As the sūra teaches, Khawla identified the problem and sought counsel from a trusted expert (the Prophet, peace be upon him). After doing so, God revealed the answer and it was implemented. Identifying and assessing behaviors that may regularly contribute to tensions and lead to conflict is a critical process. At the same time, assessing those positive behaviors, actions, and words that strengthen the relationship is important. Khawla, understanding that the Islamic paradigm was based on justice and mercy, complained to the Prophet (peace be upon him). Her example indicates one of the sound methodological aspects: When people critically identify their problems and search for answers in the Qur'an, they will find them. The fact that her answer came through revelation shows her question's significance and legitimacy.

Indeed, this model illustrates how to deal with abuses in the family. "Even if any of you say to their wives, 'You are to me like my mother's back,' they are not their mothers. Their only mothers are those who gave birth to them. What they say is certainly blameworthy and false, but God is pardoning and forgiving'" (58:2). This example indicates the role of family members in terms of implementing and practicing compassionate mutual counseling and accountability to foster mutual understanding and transformation toward healthy relationships. Different sūras identify the root causes of common misconceptions that affect human actions and behavior and, as a result, lead to transgression, oppression, and corruption.

Islam clearly prohibits oppression, which it defines as any type of injustice committed against another person. Although the specific term "domestic violence" is absent from pre-modern Muslim cultures, and while some have denied that it even exists, the Qur'an identifies such behaviors consistent with it under the umbrella of oppression. The concept that "believers, men and women,

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[5] *Ṣaḥiḥ Muslīm*, hadith 49; *40 Hadith an-Nawawi*, hadith 34.

are protectors of one another"[6] establishes the nature of their mutual relationships at the societal level. It is supposed to be applied at the family level as well, where oppression is defined as any act that violates the specific boundaries delineated by God to protect each spouse's and their children's rights. The Qur'an even mentions the general categories of domestic oppression, among them aggression, wrongdoing, harsh treatment, and inflicting harm or injury. The terms it uses in this regard are *'udwān, adhl, and ḍarār* . All actions and words that fall into any of these categories violate the Islamic values of justice, equality, freedom, mercy, and forgiveness and are inconsistent with the qualities of *al-Mutaqīn* (God-conscious people).[7]

The beliefs and practices of Muslims encompass diverse cultural and religious perspectives, even within the same racial and ethnic groups. Domestic oppression is a reality in every society and of every faith, culture, and race. Like other faith communities, cultural and religious interpretations shape Muslims' understanding of and response to domestic violence/oppression.[8]

Striving for the past four decades to continue upholding good and forbidding evil in the United States, as Muslim communities and organizations across the country confront the realities of domestic violence and its negative impact on all human relations, they began to respond and take a stand against domestic oppression.

Gradually, Muslim Americans started establishing a variety of services that are culturally appropriate for Muslims experiencing abuse. Since the 1980s, many great organizations and programs were established, among them Al Baitu Nisa (Gaithersburg, MD), Baitul Hemayah (Newark, NJ), Baitul Salaam Network (Atlanta, GA), Muslimat Al-Nisaa (Baltimore, MD), Central Texas Muslimaat (Austin, TX), the Committee on Domestic Harmony (Long Island, NY), the national Islamic Social Services Association (Tempe, AZ), NISWA (Lomita, CA), the Islamic Social Services Association, Inc. (ISSA), and Turning Point (Flushing, NY).[9] Many of them provide interpretation, legal advice or referrals to legal resources, crisis intervention, financial assistance, individual and family counseling, premarital counseling, imam education, support groups, and job placement services. A few programs have shelters. In addition, many provide

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[6] 9:71-72.
[7] Recite: 2:231, 233; 4:1, 135; 5:8; 49:10-13; 58:9; 60:11; 64:16; and 65:1.
[8] Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, "Change from Within: Diverse perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities," eds. (VA: Peaceful Families Project, 2007), p. 20.
[9] Ibid, p. 23. See also: https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dvdirectory.html.

advocacy programs in which Muslim leaders and community members can raise awareness about domestic violence.[10]

I have personally witnessed and participated in an extraordinary experience in the Northern Virginia Muslim community. A group of pioneers in the 1990s worked on identifying the problem and its impact and searching for solutions. In 1992, Sharifa Alkhateeb (1946-2004), may Allah have mercy on her, founded the North American Council for Muslim Women (NACMW) and served as its first president. NACMW was the first national organization of American Muslim women.[11] In 1993, she conducted the first documented survey designed to assess the incidence of domestic violence among Muslim leaders in the US. This important database provided serious evidence for the Muslim leaders to consider this issue as one of the significant challenges that should be discussed. Later, in 2000, with funding from the Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women, she established the Peaceful Families Project.[12.]

One of my first memories in this regard is Alkhateeb's invitation to attend a workshop by the North American Council for Muslim Women, which she had organized to discuss various issues related to marital conflict and abuse. She asked me to extract Qur'anic verses and hadith relevant to preventing domestic violence and building healthy families. At the same time, I was involved in teaching the Qur'an to children at the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS Center) Sunday school and holding sisters' *ḥalaqa*s. Some sisters complained about their husbands' anger and reported verbal and emotional abuse, and sometimes even physical violence toward them.

Discussing these women's issues with my friend Salma Abugideiri, who was also deeply involved in community work, woke us up to the fact that our community's members were experiencing serious marital problems that required more help from the masjid and beyond. When Imam Mohamed Magid joined the ADAMS community in the mid-1990s, he supported our efforts. Together, we created many family-support programs, among them parenting classes and enrichment programs rooted in the Qur'an and the life example of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) to help all family members increase their awareness and education. As many community members can relate, we became each other's extended family. God created families and extended families as mini-

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[10] Ibid, p. 23.

[11] Barazangi, Nimat Hafez, "The Legacy of a Remarkable Muslim Woman: Sharifa Alkhateeb". (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 2004). https://ecommons.cornell.edu/handle/1813/7784.
[12] https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/dvdirectory.html

*umma*s to help one another uphold good and forbid evil, to abolish unjust customs and behaviors, and to build the healthy relationships modeled by the first generation of Muslims.

Alkhateeb, who was active in bringing this awareness to the community, established the Peaceful Families Project. This pioneering institution, focused on anti-domestic violence advocacy within the community, worked on behalf of victims and collaborated with Muslim leaders, communities, and activists nationwide while organizing workshops to raise awareness levels.[13] Dr. Azizah al-Hibri, a law professor and Islamic scholar at the University of Richmond, in 1993 founded KARAMAH (Dignity) to support the rights of Muslim women worldwide through educational programs and jurisprudential scholarship and to develop a network of like-minded Muslim jurists and leaders. KARAMAH's training was aimed at equipping women with the tools necessary to make a beneficial difference from within their own religious contexts. In addition, the organization has built a network of Muslim women jurists, lawyers, and leaders who contribute to equitable Islamic legal scholarship. In addition, in 2003 al-Hibri published her important article on domestic violence from a juristic approach.[14]

FAITH Social Services, founded in 1999 by a group of dedicated people, including Tanveer Mirza and Ambreen Ahmed, aims to build self-sufficiency in the individuals and families they support. Its programs help enrich the clients' lives by facilitating and empowering them to develop their spiritual, mental, emotional, and intellectual selves. The organization also seeks to support the entire person, from helping them solve their immediate needs and challenges to providing avenues toward building, sustaining, and enriching their life through education. During this period, FAITH also started its "Muslim Men Against Domestic Violence" program. Led by Imam Johari Abdul Malik, this group vowed to speak to abusers and help them reform.

This collective concern, which developed a great collaborative effort to approach this issue intellectually and practically, led to establishing various organizations and setting up important scholarships. As the Muslim American community continued to grow and become more diverse, the need to understand and explain Islam's perspective on domestic violence also grew. The question of its meaning and impact on a family's stability, security, and tranquility has been a major concern for our community. This issue's intensity and complexity, as well

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[13] Peaceful Families Project, https://www.peacefulfamilies.org/

[14] Azizah Y. al-Hibri, "An Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence," 27 *Fordham Int'l L.J.* 195 (2003).[15] Abugideiri, S., and Z. Alwani. *What Islam says about Domestic Violence*. (Herndon: FAITH, 2003, 2d ed., 2008; digital edition, 2022).

as its negative impact on women, children, and family stability, led to an intense conversation and raised critical questions.

I personally continue to work with other sisters and brothers to deal with domestic oppression. In 2003, Abugideiri and I wrote *What Islam says about Domestic Violence: A Guide for Helping Muslims Families*. Published by FAITH through a collaborative effort led by Ambreen Ahmed,[15] it was written for advocates, police officers, mental health workers, shelter staff, medical providers, lawyers, and other stakeholders. In 2007, I developed a Qur'anic model that both outlines the Qur'anic-Prophetic model of harmony in the family and lays the foundation for establishing and maintaining peaceful families. The foundational aspects of this model were published in the first chapter of the book, *Change from Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities*, edited by Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri.[16] During this journey of standing up for justice to create peaceful and compassionate individuals, families, and communities, I have had the honor of knowing and working with many sisters, among them my close friend Dr. Maryam Funches (d. 2007), may Allah have mercy on her, and Asma Hanif. In 2005, Dr. Funches co-founded Muslimat Al-Nisaa with Asma Hanif who is currently directing this much needed shelter. Today, I continue working with many dear sisters like Bonita McGee, who graciously consented to serve as a guest editor for this special issue and Dr. Aneesah Nadir who contributed her reflection in this volume. But despite these great efforts, domestic violence in our community continues. We have to continue dealing with oppression as a communal issue and hold ourselves, as well as our families and community, responsible for ending it. We have to identify the negative behaviors and practices that affect the family, because the family is the cornerstone of society. Today, Muslims worldwide must continue the first generation's stance of engaging with the Qur'an and working together to abolish unjust customs and behaviors. Muslim scholars, lawyers, imams, counselors, social workers, social scientists, and activists bear the responsibility for identifying negative social norms, educating society on what the Qur'an and the Prophet (peace be upon him) defined as positive social norms, and encouraging the community to follow this model.

This issue presents contributions from various experts in the field.

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[15] Abugideiri, S., and Z. Alwani. *What Islam says about Domestic Violence*. (Herndon: FAITH, 2003, 2d ed., 2008; digital edition, 2022).

[16] Zainab Alwani, "The Qur'anic Model to Harmony in Family Relations, In Change from Within: Diverse perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities," eds. Maha B. Alkhateeb and Salma Elkadi Abugideiri, (VA: Peaceful Families Project, 2007).

In the "Articles" section, Zainab Alwani uses her "Transforming the Self, Family, and Society through a Qur'anic Ethos" to examine how the Qur'an deals with oppressing oneself and others. She discusses oppression's spiritual roots, and demonstrates how the problems it causes can be prevented by constant self-awareness and self-accountability. The methodology used, reading the Qur'an intra-textually as one structural unity (*al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān*), involves cross-examining and integrating the sacred text's linguistic, structural, and conceptual elements.

Hasnaa Mokhtar and Tahani Chaudhry's "Becoming Allies: Introducing a Framework for Intersectional Allyship to Muslim Survivors of Gender-based Violence," envisions possibilities for Muslims' role as allies by looking into the intersection of Islamophobia, racism, sexism, and domestic violence within their own communities. The presented framework gives community allies, including faith leaders, activists, and community members, both guidelines in this regard as well as a framework the community can use to take action.

In their "Punishment, Child Abuse, and Mandated Reporting," Khalid Elzamzamy, M.D., M.A., Zehra Hazratji, M.A., and Maryum Khwaja, L.C.S.W.R., explore the challenges and ideals of addressing corporal punishment and physical abuse. They outline the perspectives of Islam and professional clinical practice, with a particular focus on the American Muslim context. They then analyze the ethical dilemmas facing clinicians, who are legally required to report child abuse, and offer practical recommendations informed by the Islamic tradition and existing literature.

Shariq Siddiqui and Zeeshan Noor, authors of "The Role of Muslim American Nonprofits in Combating Domestic Violence in the Community: An Exploratory Overview," discuss the Islamic Society of North America's efforts to fight domestic violence in the Muslim American community from 1997 through 2005.

In the special Healing section, Juliane Hammer's "Trauma, Witness, and Healing: Muslim Women Artists on Domestic Violence" presents the stories of survivors through the works of various female artists. She connects their storytelling with an awareness of the reality of such violence, as well as the power and possibility of healing for them. This section also includes a powerful personal story "Domestic Violence: A Personal Reflection and Journey" by Gameelah Mohamed.

This issue also contains four reflections and one book review. The Reflections section comprises four contributions: Rami Nsour's "My Reflections on Spiritual Abuse"; Aneesah Nadir's "Premarital Education: Primary Prevention for Domestic Violence"; Denise Ziya Berte's "In Their Names"; and Bonita R. McGee's and Shaina (Nur) Ayers' "Field Notes: Reflections on Addressing Domestic Violence in American Muslim Communities." Amani Khelifa reviewed

Martin Nguyen's *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World with Faith and Imagination* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2018). Please also read the Call for Papers for our next journal edition and spread it among your colleagues and students.

Zainab Alwani
Editor, *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice*

Transforming the Self, Family and Society through a Qur'anic Ethos

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Abstract

This article examines how the Qur'an transforms self, family and society; discusses oppression of oneself and others; and demonstrates how the problems it causes can be prevented by constant self-awareness and self-accountability. In addition, it addresses various issues including the Qur'an's view of oppression's spiritual roots, the origin of human relations, and *taqwā*'s relationship with self-development. In addition, and most importantly, it identifies the oppressor and the oppressed; explains how oppressors can transform themselves; why God holds people accountable; and how to evaluate our strategies' success or failure in dealing with oppression. The methodology used is that of reading the Qurʾan intra-textually as one structural unity (*al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān*). This involves cross-examining and integrating the sacred text's linguistic, structural, and conceptual elements. The overarching goal of this approach is to prevent injustice and promote peace through justice, mercy, and mutual accountability.

Keywords: Qur'an, human self-worth, taqwa, oppression (*ẓulm*), accountability, repentance

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

Introduction

Islam, God's final message to humanity, came to light in a brutal and cruel environment. Oppression and violence were pervasive practices worldwide at that time. The poor, orphans, widows, and vulnerable were oppressed. Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), following God's revelation, transformed the life of countless oppressed and other individuals and gradually led them to develop the best community in history. Many of the oppressed quickly accepted the message, and within a short time transformed themselves into role models for humanity by embodying a higher standard of morality. This reflects the paradigm shift of understanding the meaning of power from the Qur'anic-prophetic model. Indeed, the model emphasizes that the vulnerable wellbeing is an indicator of the society's strength. Many lessons can be derived from this timeless message, among them how to leverage this model.

By attempting to understand the Qurʾan on its own terms, this article applies the methodology of *al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān* (The Qurʾan's Structural Unity).[1] This holistic method reads the Qurʾan as a unified text through its linguistic, structural, and conceptual elements because when read in its entirety the divine text represent an integrated whole. In addition, this approach highlights how the meaning of a specific term changes, but never to the extent that its original meaning is violated. Tracing how the relevant terms are derived from their root leads to constructing the Islamic framework for any issue. This preliminary study sheds light on this holistic approach. The Qur'an presents the issue, identifies the problem's root, highlights its negative impact on people and society, and then presents the solution by taking proactive measures to either fix or remove it. Indeed, it presents insights on how to avoid the problem altogether, as with the case of approaching oppression from a spiritual aspect. As the Qurʾan refers to itself as *al-Muṣaddiq* (the confirmer or verifier of truth; 5:48) and *Muhaymin* (overseer, protector, guardian, witness, and determiner of the truth), it holds us accountable to the truth.[2] Consequently, we should seek its definition when making a decision.[3] Therefore, applying a *Muṣaddiq-Muhaymin* methodology allows us to read and analyze any situation or issue in light of the Qur'an.[4]

Humanity: An Honorable Origin, Identity, and Self Worth

The story of humanity begins in heaven. The first scene began when God announced to the angels and Iblīs (18:50) that human beings will serve as *khalīfa* – His representative on Earth (2:30). "Remember when your *Rabb* said to the

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[1] For more details of the classical and contemporary debates concerning this method's genealogy, see Zainab Alwani, "Al-waḥda al-binā'iyya li-l-Qur'ān: A Methodology for Understanding the Qur'an in the Modern Day," Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice, 1:1 (2018): 7-27. Al-Farahi, Abd al Hamid, Qur'anic Vocabulary New Looks in the Interpretation of Qur'anic words, Muhammad Ajmal Ayoub Aslihi Beirut: Dār al-Gārb al-Islāmī, 2002.

[2] The Qurʾan only mentions *Muhaymin*: God uses it both for Himself (59:23) and the Qurʾan (5:48). It is related to Allah's names *al-Raqīb* (The Watcher), *al-Ḥafīẓ* (The One who protects and guards), and *Al-Shahīd* (The Witness). See (5:48) in: Razi Fakhr al-Din Muhammad ibn. al-Tafsīr al-kabīr. Lebanon: Dar al-Fikr, 2005. Ibn Ashur, Muhammad al-Tahir, al-Tahrir and al-Tanwir, Tunis: al-Dar al-Tunisiyya li'l-Nashr, 1984.

[3] See 'A'isha Abd al-Rahman bint al-Shati', *al-Tafsīr al-bayānī li-l-Qurʾān al-karīm* (Cairo: Dar al-Ma'arif, 1971 & 1981) and Issa J. Boullata, "Modern Qur'ān Exegesis: A Study of Bint al-Shati's method," *The Muslim World* 64 (1974): 103.

[4] See the application of this methodology on building the meaning of Kafala as a Qur'anic concept: https://journals.iupui.edu/index.php/JIFP/article/view/24666

angels, 'I am appointing a representative (*khalīfa*) on Earth.'" The astonished angels, who by nature can think only of absolute goodness and complete peace, responded: "Will You appoint on it someone who would spread corruption and shed blood, whereas we celebrate Your praises and extol Your holiness?" (2:30). God's answer settled the matter: "I surely know that of which you have no knowledge" and "God provided His representative with the knowledge and skills needed to fulfill this role" (2:31-33). While the angels showed no signs of arrogance and prostrated without hesitation, Iblīs refused to comply (15:30-31) on the grounds that: "I am better than him: You created me out of fire, while You created him out of clay" (7: 12). The reply to his arrogance was immediately: "[God] said: Off with you hence! It is not for you to show your arrogance here. Get out, then; you will always be among the humiliated" (7:13 and 15:32-42).

He was expelled from heaven, deprived of God's grace, and subjected to permanent humiliation. Envy eats Iblīs' heart: He states that Adam was created of clay, but ignores the fact that God breathed[5] into that clay (17:61) and further speaks arrogantly of Adam: "You see this being whom You have exalted above me! You have given this weak creature a position of honor. Yet, if You will give me respite until the Day of Resurrection, I shall bring his descendants, all but a few, under my sway" (17:62). But Iblīs overlooks one fact: Human beings, all of whom have a sense of personal honor, can manage their desires and choose to strike a balance between living the life with which God gifted them and fulfilling their responsibilities to His creations as His representative. Iblīs chooses not to see them when they are elevated by God's guidance, which empowers them to resist temptation and evil. Indeed, people are distinct from all other creations due to their free will and exercise of choice.

The Qur'anic definition for human beings, *insān*, stems from *'uns*, to have affection, be friendly, familiar, intimate, or sociable.[6] People often develop affection and familiarity for things other than God, like wealth and worldly things (3:14), that make them forget their purpose in life (20:115, 76:1-2, and 59:19). Therefore, the Qurʾan constantly reminds humanity of its origin, mission, and

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[5] "When I have shaped him and breathed from My Spirit into him, bow down before him" (38:72). The word *rūḥi* in the Qur'an is usually translated as spirit or soul for lack of an accurate words to explain it. However, the Qur'an explains this: And they ask you about *al-rūḥ*. Say, 'The *rūḥ* is part of my Lord's domain. You have only been given a little knowledge.'(17:85).

[6] Ibn Fares, *Maqayes Al-Lughah*, vol. 5, p. 421. *Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, al-Mufradāt fī gharīb al-Qur'ān*, Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa. p. 491. See: E. Badawi and M.A. Haleem, *Arabic-English Dictionary for Qur'anic Usage*, Leiden-Boston: Brill, 2008. p. 83-84 and see p. 962.

purpose. Indeed, people should reflect deeply upon their creation and the fact that God, who loves them, has blessed them with upright, beautiful, and perfect balance in their physical, mental, and spiritual composition. They were created as the best creation and given cognitive and reflective abilities, as well as intelligence (*'aql*) and heart (*qalb*), to enable them to distinguish between good and evil.

God the Creator, the One Who owns all knowledge and wisdom, explains in detail the exact plan for human beings to fulfill their responsibility and how He will hold them accountable. God wants humanity to know, love, and worship Him out of their own free will and to voluntarily accept the trust (*amānah*) and responsibility (33:72) they have agreed to shoulder. God's infinite justice and mercy do not connect cosmic honor (*karāmah*) and dignity with one's physical or social status, but with one's choices, actions, and deeds (3:195, 4:124, 16:97, and 40:40). However, the Creator established a unique criterion for greatness: attaining *taqwā*. "We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise (each other): God is all knowing, all aware" (49:13). In short, what matters is the person's efforts to improve her/his character and deeds. Therefore, God attributes no virtue to one's physical appearance (95:4 and 82:5-7), but only to one's level of *taqwā* (God-consciousness), which builds one's constant self-awareness.

All human beings' inherent humanity makes them unique and worthy of respect, cosmic honor, and dignity. Dignity is an inherent value: "Indeed, We honored the progeny of Adam, bore them across land and sea, provided them with good things for their sustenance, and favored them far above many of Our creation" (17:70). Human beings are given a degree of choice so they can either follow the revelations conveyed to them by God's messengers, or listen to Satan, who mobilizes all his power to undermine their position. Everyone then returns to its Creator, via death, with their good and evil deeds. The Qur'an assures and emphasizes that on the Day of Judgment, His reckoning will be most fair and accurate. Every action, as little as it may be, shall be taken into account (2:281 and 16:111).

***Taqwā*: Unique Self-Measurement and True Self-Awareness**

The Qur'an is a timeless guidance for human beings in their journey of self-exploration, self-development and beyond: "We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him: God is all knowing, all aware" (49:13).

Taqwā is derived from *waqā*, which literally means to preserve, protect, safeguard, shield from, and keep safe from.[7] *Taqwā* means "forbearance, fear, abstinence, and piety,[8] as well as "being careful, knowing your place in the cosmos." This characteristic is seen when one experiences the awe of God, which "inspires a person to be on guard against wrong feeling and action, and eager to do the things which please God."[9] Being devout, pious, and mindful of God is a state of the heart, a state that keeps one always conscious of God's presence.

Taqwā helps one maintain self-evaluation, which is the ability to examine oneself internally as regards his/her intentions, beliefs, feelings, attitudes, behaviors, habits, and relationships. This critical self-evaluation allows people to filter and cleanse their inner self based on their level of *taqwā*. This motivation enables the person who cultivates it to draw closer to God by remaining steadfast on the Straight Path and protects her/him from deviation (8:29, 33:70, and 22:32). As *taqwā* inhabits the heart and only God knows what it conceals, no human being can judge another person's level of *taqwā* (2:204). **Cultivating *taqwā* is a lifelong process that requires constant personal effort.**

Muslim scholars have exerted tremendous effort in analyzing and explaining *taqwā* and how to achieve it.[10] The Qur'an mentions *taqwā* and its derivatives over 250 times, and in every verse it teaches new meanings. Sūra al-Shams (91:8) mentions it in contrast with moral failings (*fujūr*). Tracing these two concepts, namely moral failings (*fujūraha*) and God-consciousness (*taqwāha*) (91:8), throughout the Qur'an helps one understand the inner process and how it impacts the person's perception, worldview, actions, and, finally, the end result of her/his actions.

The basis of the Qur'anic concept of human psychology is outlined in these four verses:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ۝ فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ۝ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَن زَكَّاهَا ۝ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَن دَسَّاهَا

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[7] Al-Raqīb, *al-Mufradāt*, p. 530. E. Badawi and M.A. Haleem, p. 1069. http://www.ahya.org/amm/modules.php?name=Sections&op=viewarticle&artid=154.

[8] John L. Esposito, ed. (2003). *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam*. Oxford University Press. p. 314. Retrieved 2015-07-15.

[9] Anwer Mahmoud Zanaty. *Glossary Of Islamic Terms*. IslamKotob. p. 221. Retrieved 2015-07-15.
Glossary Of Islamic Terms - Google Books . *https://simplyislam.academy/blog/what-is-taqwā-and-how-to-build-it*.

[10] Al Ghazāli, Abū Hamid. *Ihyā' 'Ul ūm al-Dīn*. Juz' III. Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifa, 1982.

> By the soul and the One Who fashioned it and inspired it with (moral failings) [in another translation (its own rebellion)] (*fujūraha*) as well as with consciousness of God (*taqwāha*). Successful indeed is the one who purifies their soul, and the one who corrupts it fails! (91:7-10).[11]

The position of every word in the Qur'an has a function and specific purpose, just like each star in the sky (56:75-80). Verse 8 (*fa-alhamahā fujūrahā wataqwāhā*) reveals that the human being (*insān*) is designed with a dual nature, for only such a reality allows one to choose good or evil. Moreover, this allows them to deal with all of the other creations that live on and in the earth. However, this dual nature and ability gives him/her an unlimited scope within him/herself. The verse portrays this unique inner scene with two critical terms: *fujūrahā* and *taqwāhā*. *Fajjar* means to dig up the ground and create an outlet so the water can flow out; to break out of, erupt, or burst; and to cause to explode (explosion), both literally and in the sense of a violent emotion or a situation that arises or develops suddenly.[12] *Fajara* also means to overflow, descend suddenly, break out, rush in, and ignite. The Qur'an uses *fajara* and *tafjīr* for creating an outlet so water can flow out (2:60; 17:90-91); to act immorally, lie, sin without caring, increasing one's sins and delaying repentance, deviate from the truth and wrong oneself (38:28, 80:42, 82:14, and 83:7). All of the above encompasses the depth of *fujūrahā*, which describes a human being's inner nature. In this verse, *fujūrahā* is specifically contrasted with (*taqwāhā*), for God wants people to look inward, instead of blaming others, for choosing to act on these desires instead of strengthening their shield of *taqwā*.

Al-Muttaqūn: Truth Seekers

Tracing these two concepts throughout the Qur'an reveals that *fajār* and its derivatives are used in the context of the Day of Judgment. Each sūra guides people to contemplate their future and think of the consequences of their actions.

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[11] See Al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl al Qur'ān*, ed. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1961), (91:7-10); al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2nd ed., ed. Muṣtafā Ḥusyan Aḥmad (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Istiqāma, 1952), (91:7-10; Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisiyya lil-Nashr, 1984) (91:7-10).

[12] Muḥammad ibn Mukarram ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣadr, 1410 AH). Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zabīdī, *Tāj al-'Arūs* (Beirut: Lebanese American University, LAU Stacks Quarto PJ6620 .M852, 1966). Online dictionary: http://www.baheth.info/index.jsp. https://lau.summon.serialssolutions.com/?#!/search?ho=t&fvf=ContentType,Book%20%2F%20eBook,f&l=en&q=lisan%20al-arab. *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, Ed. J M. Cowan. Arabic-English Dictionary.

Sūras 75:5, 82:3, 83:7, and 80:42 contain clear descriptions of the *fujjār*'s characteristics, actions, and end of the consequences in contrast with the *muttaqūn* or *'abrār*. The 'abrār (the pious, the righteous) means one who practices kindness and charity (19:32). The Qur'an contrasts the *muttaqūn* and *'abrār* with the *fujjār* (38:28 and 83:7 and 18). It clearly defines the *muttaqūn* as "those who bring the truth and accept it – those are the truly pious" (39:33). Verses 2:44 and 3:92 define *birr* as the behavior that reflects one's *taqwā* in all aspects of one's life.[13] Verse 2:177 which defines *taqwā* holistically, begins with the belief or worldview, moves to the actions and attributes of one's personality, and concludes with "they are people of truth in fulfilling their commitment as representatives of God on earth because they are the *Muttaqūn*." This demonstrates the highest level of perseverance in any circumstances, as well as one's consistent effort to perform at this level of dedication.

Therefore, the person who is constantly mindful of the Creator's presence, practices self-awareness, searches for the truth even if it is against her/his opinion, is among the '*abrār*. This status indicates the high level of someone who has attained *taqwā* and acts according to God's will. As a result, ⌜"And they will be told,⌝ "All this is surely a reward for you. Your striving has been appreciated" (76:22). Therefore, the Qur'anic concept of *birr* encompasses all the righteous deeds with full understanding of its objectives and impacts (2:177,[14] 2:189, 3:92, 5:2, and 58:9). The *Muttaqūn*, identified as the "patient, true, obedient in worshiping God, spend (in the Way of God), and seek forgiveness in the last hours of the night" (3:17), can control their anger, manage their negative feelings, practice forgiveness, and be grateful. These people, aware of the source of sin (i.e., Satan), remember God, seek refuge in Him, and turn back to Him quickly, after which they remain steadfast and correct their mistakes (7:199-205). This comprehensive description of attributes of the *Muttaqūn* and the *'abrār* clearly

[13] Abdul Rahman Hallil, (2017), *Mafhūm al Bir wa al -Mandūmah al 'Akhlaqīyah al Qur'ānīya: Al bunīyah wa al-siyāq*, Journal of Islamic Ethics, *1*(1-2), 122-157. doi: https://doi.org/10.1163/24685542-12340006 https://brill.com/view/journals/jie/1/1-2/article-p122_6.xml

[14] "It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards east or west; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day, the Angels, the Book, and the Messengers; to spend of your wealth, however much they cherish it to relatives, orphans, the poor, ⌜needy⌝ travelers, beggars, and for freeing captives; who establish prayer, pay alms-tax, and keep the pledges they make; and who are patient in times of suffering, adversity, and in the struggle between the truth and falsehood. Such are the people of truth, and it is they who are aware of God" (2:177).

reflect the personal transformation of people who cultivate *taqwā* and strive to make the world a better place for everyone.

Sūra Ṣād expounds on this teaching further: "O David, We have made you a vicegerent on Earth: judge, then, between people with truth (and justice), and do not follow vain desire, lest it lead you astray from the path of God. Those who go astray from the path of God will have a severe punishment for having ignored the Day of Reckoning" (38:26). God appoints David as His vicegerent on Earth, which means that he must judge justly and not follow vain desires, for doing so can easily lead people astray. The passage's concluding sentence gives a general rule that applies to all such people. However, God drew David's attention to what he might do and put him back on the right track, warning him of the consequence before he even moved toward it. Such an example warns Muslims that, as humans, they may backslide. These verses invite people to reflect on the creation of the heavens and Earth. The story of David is connected with the next verse to illustrate the truth that God wants to establish via His prophets and messengers. The two verses are interrelated: "We have not created heaven and Earth and all that is between them without a purpose" (38:27). This means that deviating from the divine guidance discharges humanity from its responsibility. People who judge based on vain desire deviate from the cosmic law that sustains the universe. Doing so is therefore a very serious matter, one that leads to corruption and disorder. People endowed with insight must always remember and reflect upon these truths.

The next verse clearly explains the meaning of *fujūrahā* and *wa taqwāhā* by comparing them. The Creator asks: "Would We treat those who believe and do good deeds and those who spread corruption in the land as equal? Would We treat those who guard themselves against evil (*al-muttaqīn*) and those who recklessly break all bounds (*al- fujjār*) in the same way?" (38:28). As the latter aspire to lead a life based solely on worldly gains, following their desires, and ignoring the coming of the Day of Judgment, they spread corruption . This verse refers back to 38:27, which states that people can properly establish their lives only if they are in harmony with the rest of the creation. In conclusion, tracing and contemplating *fujūrahā wa taqwāhā* throughout the Qur'an reveals that these two concepts show the reality of one's inner self.

The usage of these two comprehensive words shows that only the Creator can describe the inner self's miraculous creation, for they demonstrate the meaning of self-awareness, how it works, and how to develop and enhance it. They teach humanity the significance of self-awareness, being mindful of one's thoughts, feelings, and subsequent behaviors. Understanding one's feelings, as well as their causes and how they impact one's thoughts and actions, is emotional self-awareness. A person with high emotional and spiritual self-awareness understands the internal process associated with emotional experiences and thus

has greater control over them. Having an accurate sense of one's self helps the person decide how to improve his/her strengths and cope with his/her weaknesses and challenges. The person will think deeply before saying or acting upon his/her thoughts or feelings. When the protective shield is weak or its criteria are neither clear nor guided by the Divine, the person will follow his/her desires with no screening. In the case of *fujūr*, namely, when a person sins and feels no regret or need to repent, this only leads to a greater indulgence in sins. Sūra al-Muṭaffifīn describes the hearts of the *fujjār*: "But no! In fact, their hearts have been stained by all ⌜the evil⌝ they used to commit! They arrogantly indulge in disobedience and wrongdoing" (83:14-15).

Arrogant people do not consider God, so they take pride in their evil deeds and continue to hurt others by spreading corruption. "We will set up the scales of justice on the Day of Judgment, so no soul will be wronged in the least. And ⌜even⌝ if a deed is the weight of a mustard seed, We will bring it forth. And sufficient are We as a ⌜vigilant⌝ Reckoner" (21:47). This verse provides the criterion for judgment. The broader goal is to remind people of that Day's ultimate goal: to hold them accountable for their deeds. The Judge, the Creator who recorded everything accurately, will judge them justly, for He is the Most Merciful, The Just. Muslims may experience severely testing times and calamities that shake their world's very foundation. Hence, those who remain steadfast, doubt-free, and pursue the right way deserve high rank with God: "Believers, be mindful of God, speak in a direct fashion and to good purpose, and God will put your deeds right for you and forgive you your sins. Whoever obeys God and His Messenger will truly achieve a great triumph" (33:70-71). **A strong sense of *taqwā* alerts the Muslims of any thoughts or feelings that might lead to actions or habits that go against God's guidance; a weak sense of *taqwā* leads to oppression.**

Oppression (*Ẓulm*)

According to a Qur'anic lexicon, *ẓulm* (wronging, oppression, injustice, unfairness, and evil) connotes a state of cosmic dysfunction or a seminal darkness upon darkness.[15] On the other hand, God the Creator is the light and source of human guidance (24:35). The original meaning of *ẓulm* is to put something in the wrong place or attribute wrong to a person (25:4), injustice (20:111), wrongdoing (6:82), and exceeding the limit.[16] The Qur'an mentions it and its derivatives about 289 times in the form of 35 derivatives, especially *ẓālim*, namely, the oppressor, the self-deceiver who acts unjustly and one who does wrong (7:105). *Maẓlūm* is

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[15] Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Mufradāt*, p. 315-316.
[16] E. Badawi and M.A. Haleem, p. 612- 613.

defined as one who is treated unjustly (17:33). Other concepts in the Qur'an related to *ẓulm* are *baghy* (outrageous behavior) and *tughyān* (aggression, corruption, tyranny, transgression, and transgression). This reflects the seriousness of this disease.

Oppression, defined as any type of injustice against oneself, another person, or a creation of God, is clearly prohibited in Islam. In this sense, the two original dimensions of *ẓulm* conjoin: *Ẓulm* as darkness associated with an ignorance of the truth, and *ẓulm* as an injustice/oppression associated with the inversion of an order of right, measure, and proportion, such as is implicit in justice (*'adl*). Indeed, *ẓulm* violates the person's *fitra*, each person's original state of purity and innocence, and accepting of his/her covenant with God to believe in Him and to accept or reject His guidance. The Qur'an reminds humanity of its *fitra* (original disposition, natural constitution, or innate nature)[17]: "And so stand firm and true in your devotion toward the (one ever-true) faith, in accordance with the natural disposition which God instilled in humanity – let there be no change in God's creation – and that is the Straight Way, though most people do not realize it" (30:30). Therefore, oppression corrupts *fitra* and causes the person to ignore mercy, compassion, and justice (22:39).

The Qur'an provides another meaning for oppression as well: transgressing the limits or boundaries set by God, and as something that prohibits oppression at all levels of society (2:114 and 140 and 4:29-31). It prohibits any form of oppression, which could be defined as "an unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power."[18] *Ẓulm*, derived from the root *ẓ–l–m*, is the opposite of justice (*'adl*). The unique Qur'anic concept of *ẓulm al-nafs*, which refers to the one wronged, self-deception, self-betrayal, and self-harm, emphasizes one's personal responsibility and accountability (20:111). *Ẓulm* stems from a lack of self-understanding, which leads one to forget that God created humanity to serve as His trustees and will hold them accountable in the Hereafter. This reflects the facts that they have no fear of accountability (21:47)[19] and control over their *nafs*' impulses. Greed for wealth and power dominate their soul, and restrictions to achieving one's desires are brushed aside.

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[17] Ibid., p. 743

[18] *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, 1983.

[19] Yasien Mohamed, "More Than Just Law: The Idea of Justice in the Qur'an," https://yaqeeninstitute.org/read/paper/the-idea-of-justice-in-the- Qur'an. See also Yasien Mohamed, *The Path to Virtue: The Ethical Philosophy of al-Raghib al- Isfahani* (Kuala Lumpur: ISTAC, 2006).

The Oppressor: Self-Deception (*Ẓulm al-Nafs*)

In their own minds, the oppressors exaggerate their worth and minimize that of the oppressed. This arrogant self-deception is based upon such things as lineage, nationality, education, wealth, religion, gender, beauty, age, and physical strength. To protect one's soul against self-deception, one needs to be in a constant state of *taqwā*. Self-deceived people often overestimate their positive attributes (e.g., intelligence, moral character, and competence) and underestimate their negative ones (e.g., mistakes, character flaws, and ignorance). This interesting cycle begins with the person desiring to be right in everything. They then move to gathering data that proves this "fact." Once they obtain that delusional confirmation, they are reaffirmed in their self-bias. Anyone who challenges, disagrees, or poses a different idea instantly insults that person's ego, regardless of the truth.

The Qur'an examines this type of disease of the heart through the example of Pharaoh. This narcissistic, self-centered, and arrogant ruler, who had no regard for the value of human life, proclaimed to his people that "I am your lord, the most high" (79:24). He enslaved, threatened, and tortured people, and thus became a representative of the worst type of *ẓālim*. Trapping himself in a cycle of extreme self-deception, he felt right all the time and surrounded himself with people who reaffirmed his belief: "Pharaoh ordered, 'O Hāmān! Build me a high tower so I may reach the pathways leading up to the heavens and look for the God of Moses, although I am sure he is a liar.' And so Pharaoh's evil deeds were made so appealing to him that he was hindered from the ˹Right˺ Way. But his plotting was only in vain" (40:36-37). Anyone who challenged his belief became his worst enemy: "Pharaoh threatened, 'How dare you believe in him before I give you permission? This must be a conspiracy you devised in the city to drive out its people, but soon you will see'" (7:123). As a result, he became the worst oppressor: "Indeed, We sent Moses with Our signs and compelling proof to Pharaoh and his supporters, but they followed Pharaoh's orders, and Pharaoh's orders were misguided" (11:96-97). The Qur'an continues to describe the Pharaoh's thinking and behavior:

> Pharaoh declared, 'Counselors! I know of no other god for you but myself. So bake bricks out of clay for me, O Hāmān, and build a high tower so I may look at the God of Moses, although I am sure he is a liar.' And so he and his soldiers behaved arrogantly in the land with no right, thinking they would never be returned to Us. So We seized him and his soldiers, casting them into the sea. See then what was the end of the wrongdoers! (28:38-40)

This story, an unparalleled example of arrogance and narcissism that led to the worst *ẓulm* against people, shows that those who oppress themselves or others will fail. Pharaoh is an extreme case; however, his behavior is the result of continuous neglect of small thoughts and actions that eventually turned him into a

totally unjust, oppressive ruler. Those who succeed are the determined people who remain continuously aware of their thoughts and behavior and thereby negate *ẓulm*.

The three-step process of breaking this cycle of arrogance begins with acknowledging that one has a problem, humbling oneself by acknowledging one's ignorance (believing that God is the source of knowledge and all blessings makes one humble), and instantly repenting and seeking God's forgiveness and guidance. The Qur'an reminds people: "It is God who brought you out of your mothers' wombs knowing nothing, and gave you hearing and sight and minds, so that you might be thankful" (16:78). The Qur'an affirms: "We raise the rank of whoever We will. Above everyone who has knowledge there is the One who is all knowing" (12:76). In addition, the Qur'an describes three kinds of *ẓulm*: (1) between human beings and God; anyone who rejects faith in God is an aggressor (*ẓālim*); (2) among people: "Those who unjustly eat up the property of the orphans eat fire into their own bodies" (4:10 and 2:220); and (3) between the person and self, which the Qur'an calls wronging one's own soul (*ẓulm al-nafs*) (2:231, 3:117 and 135, 18:35, 35:32, and 37:113). **The Qur'an provides examples of both individual human beings and groups to help people make their own choices. The worst example of an oppressor is Pharaoh.**

<u>The Arrogant Man: The Owner of the Two Gardens</u>

In this story, the Qur'an provides a clear example of *muttaqī* and a *ẓālim*. "Tell them an example of two men. To one We gave two gardens of grapevines, which We surrounded with palm trees and placed ˹various˺ crops in between" (18:32). What did he do? He went into his garden and wronged himself by saying,

> 'I do not think this will ever perish, nor do I think the Hour will ˹ever˺ come. Even if I were to be taken back to my Lord, I would certainly find something even better there.' His ˹believing˺ companion replied, while conversing with him, 'Do you disbelieve in the One Who created you from dust, then ˹developed you˺ from a sperm-drop, then formed you into a man? But as for me: He is God, my Lord, and I will never associate anyone with my Lord ˹in worship˺. If only, when you entered your garden, you had said, "This is God's will. There is no power not [given] by God." Although you see I have less wealth and offspring than you, perhaps my Lord will grant me ˹something˺ better than your garden, and send down upon your garden a thunderbolt from the sky, turning it into a barren waste'. (18:35-39)

The man with the two gardens attributed his success to his own doing and denied the blessings God had bestowed on him; the *muttaqī* tried to enlighten him by holding him accountable and reminding him that God is the one who had blessed him.

‘Ād[20] and Thamūd

“Have they never heard the stories about their predecessors, the peoples of Noah, ‘Ād, Thamūd, Abraham, Midian, and the ruined cities? Their messengers came to them with clear evidence of the truth: God would not deceive them; they deceived themselves” (9:70). In other words, God did not wrong them.

“Did you not see how your Lord dealt with people of ‘Ād, of Iram, [the city] of lofty pillars, unmatched in any other land; and Thamūd who carved ⸢their homes into⸣ the rocks in the ⸢Stone⸣ Valley; and the Pharaoh of mighty structures? They all transgressed throughout the land, spreading much corruption there. So your Lord unleashed on them a scourge of punishment. Your Lord is always watchful” (89:6-14). The people of Thamūd were either *ẓālim* or quiet about the *ẓulm* they witnessed, although the oppressors were a small minority. The majority’s silence created a culture that accepted *ẓulm*, which earned them God’s wrath (27:45-53).

The Prophets as Role Models

Those who repent and who seek closeness to their Creator will be successful (38:24-25). On the other hand, the *fujjār* delay repentance, which hardens their hearts and leads them to indulge in more sins without regret. ‘Abdullāh [bin Mas‘ūd], a Companion of Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him), illustrates this feeling: “He said: ‘The believer sees his sins as if he was at the base of a mountain, fearing that it was about to fall upon him. The *fājir* sees his sins as if (they are) flies that stop on his nose." He said: ‘Like this’ – motioning with his hand – ‘to get them to fly away.’”[21] Here are examples of some of the prophets who immediately recognized their mistake against themselves and repented.

Ādam

In the Qur’an, God says:

> ‘O Ādam, dwell, you and your wife, in Paradise, and eat from wherever you like, but do not go near this tree, otherwise you shall join the transgressors.’ Satan whispered to them so as to expose their nakedness, which had been hidden from them: he said, ‘Your Lord only forbade you this tree to prevent you becoming angels or immortals’… So he brought about their fall through deception. And when they tasted of the tree, their

[20] Anwer Mahmoud Zanaty. *Glossary Of Islamic Terms*. IslamKotob. https://islamfuture.wordpress.com/2009/08/08/glossary-of-islamic-terms/

[21] Al-Harith bin Suwaid said: “ ‘Abdullah [bin Mas'ud] narrated two aḥādīth to us, one of them from himself and the other from the Prophet (peace be upon him).” *Jāmi‘ at-Tirmidhī* 2497/ Book 37, Hadith 83/ Vol. 4, Book 11, Hadith 2497.

> nakedness was exposed to them, prompting them to cover themselves with leaves from Paradise. Then their Lord called out to them, 'Did I not forbid you from that tree and ˹did I not˺ tell you that Satan is your sworn enemy?' They replied, 'Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be losers (of those who practice self-*ẓulm*).' (7:19-23)

Yūnus

The Qur'an says: "And remember the man with the whale (Yūnus), when he went off angrily, thinking We could not restrict him, but then he cried out in the deep darkness, 'There is no God but You, glory be to You, I was wrong'" (21:87). Jonah's people denied the message for many years, and so he gave up, abandoned his city without God's permission, and eventually ended up in a whale's belly (37:140-148). From there, he admitted his self-*ẓulm* and sought God's forgiveness.

Mūsā

The Qur'an says:

> And when he reached full strength and maturity, We gave him wisdom and knowledge. This is how We reward the good-doers. He entered the city, unnoticed by its people, and found two men fighting: one from his own people, the other an enemy. The one from his own people cried out to him for help against the enemy. Mūsā struck him with his fist and killed him. He said, 'This must be Satan's work: clearly he is a misleading enemy.' He said, 'O my Lord, I have wronged myself (practiced self-*ẓulm*), so forgive me.' So He forgave him. Indeed, He is the most forgiving, very merciful. Mūsā stated: 'My Lord, because of the blessings You have bestowed upon me, I shall never support those who do evil. (28:14-17)

The Qur'an Warns

The Qur'an warns of apparently small behaviors that lead to self-deception. All human beings sometimes commit "self-*ẓulm*." But what exactly are these acts, and how do we avoid practicing them? The Qur'an emphasizes that attaining God-consciousness (*taqwā*) helps a person organize his/her thinking and behavior. If we commit such an act, we must immediately recognize it as of self-deception, seek forgiveness, and not repeat it .

Sūra al-Ḥujurāt

According to most scholars, Sūra al-Ḥujurāt was revealed during the late Medinan period, most likely in 630 CE/9 AH.[22] The sura establishes the rules for refined manners in a noble community by enforcing a system of accountability. As the whole community is a single entity, its integrity is one. Those who are strong and enjoy good health, intelligence, children, and support sometimes think that such blessings give them the right to ridicule the less fortunate (e.g., the vulnerable, differently abled, childless or orphans without support). But none of these earthly values is of any importance as a criterion of high status. The Qur'an keeps reminding humanity that all people descend from a single soul: "Whoever defames anyone actually defames all (Neither shall you defame yourselves.)" (49:11).

The Qur'an and the Prophet's teachings enjoin Muslims to be very careful about offending or insulting others. Believers are prohibited from name calling, mockery, and disrespecting people in any way:

> O you who believe! Let not some people among you laugh at others. It may be that the (latter) are better than the former: nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by offensive nicknames: ill-seeming is a name connoting wickedness, (to be used by one) after he has believed: and those who do not desist are (indeed) doing wrong. (49:11)

The Qur'an also warns that suspicion, which leads to spying and backbiting, should be avoided. "O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much as possible. For suspicion in some cases is a sin. And spy not on each other, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs…." (49:12). The Prophet (peace be upon him) said, "Muslims are brothers (and sisters). They should not betray or humiliate each other."[23]

Qur'an 49:12 establishes an important mechanism to protect an individual's integrity and freedom while teaching people how to cleanse their thoughts, feelings and consciences. Following the sūra's pattern, it begins with the endearing address, "Believers," and then orders them to avoid most suspicion so they do not begin to doubt others. It justifies this order by saying that some suspicion is sinful. Given that this prohibition applies to most suspicions and that the rule is that some suspicion is sinful, the verse implies that all negative suspicion should be avoided on the grounds that no one knows which part of

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[22] Quṭb, Sayyid, *Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*, 23rd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 1994), (49: 6,11, 12,13). Qutb, Sayyid, *In the Shade of the Qur'ān* (*Fī Ẓilāl al-Qurʾān*). Translated and edited by Adil Salahi and Ashur Shamis. (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2001), (49: 6,11, 12, 13).

[23] Al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* (Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmīya, 1990), *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt*.

his/her doubts are sinful. This way, we cleanse our heart and mind by entertaining only friendly and affectionate thoughts toward others. Each person in the community or family thus feels safe, and that feeling builds trust and further compassion among people.

Life in a community free of ill thoughts and actions is both peaceful and just. The verse does not just educate people's hearts and souls, but also establishes a principle that applies to their interactions. The verse moves on to lay down another principle that provides social guarantees: Do not spy on others or seek to look at other people's faults and errors, because doing so can result in suspicion-based actions. The Qur'an opposes spying because it seeks to prevent people's hearts from sinking into this shameful action and losing their high moral standards. Qur'an 49:12 compares backbiting to a rather disgusting action, that of "eating the flesh of your dead brother [or sister]," and thus opens the door of repentance. As such, this text is clearly meant to be practiced so that people can transform their actions, behaviors, and habits in order to protect everyone's sanctity and integrity: "When they hear slanderous talk, they turn away from it, saying, 'We are accountable for our deeds and you for yours. Peace ˹is our only response˺ to you! We want nothing to do with those who act ignorantly'"(28:55).
Abū Hurayrah reports that when the Prophet (peace be upon him) was asked to define backbiting, he replied: "To say something about your brother, something he dislikes." Someone then asked: "Suppose that what I say is true of my brother?" The Prophet answered: "If you say what is true, you are guilty of backbiting; but if it is untrue, you are guilty of willful defamation" (Related by al-Tirmidhī who states that it is authentic).

The Qur'an provides a comprehensive model of the oppressor–oppressed relationship. There is an individual and communal responsibility toward both. Helping oppressors continue to do wrong or indulge in wrongdoing is among the gravest of mistakes. People should not imitate them; instead, they must do what they can to stop them and make them realize their error so that the existing level of oppression will not increase and spread. Some people support oppressors because they are a relative or a friend. However, the Prophet warned against this. Narrated from Anas: "The Messenger of God said, 'Help your brother, whether he is an oppressor or he is an oppressed one.' People asked, 'O Prophet. It is all right to help him if he is oppressed, but how should we help him if he is an oppressor?' The Prophet replied, 'By preventing him from oppressing others.'"[24] The Qur'an also proclaims:

> Those who, when tyranny strikes them, defend themselves. The retribution for an evil act is an evil one like it, but whoever pardons and makes

[24] *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Volume 3, Book 43, Number 624.

> reconciliation – his reward is [due] from God. Indeed, He does not like wrongdoers. Whoever avenges himself after having been wronged – those have not upon them any cause [for blame]. The cause is only against the ones who wrong the people and tyrannize upon the earth without right. Those will have a painful punishment. Whoever is patient and forgives – indeed, that is of the matters [requiring] determination [i.e., on the part of those seeking the reward of God]. (42: 39-43)

These verses include two matters: (1) taking revenge on an oppressor and (2) forgiveness on the part of the oppressed. Here, God praises the Muslims for having the strength and will to avenge themselves in a just manner, for restoring their rights, and for not allowing aggressors to take advantage of themselves and others. They are by no means incapable, weak, or humiliated, and are quite capable of exacting revenge, and yet they forgive. Many verses and prophetic narrations address this issue and encourage the oppressed to forgive the oppressor when the former is in a position to exact revenge. The oppressed's desire to take revenge is a strong feeling, one that is very difficult to deal with immediately. However, the Qur'an encourages the oppressed to think of forgiveness because it helps him/her start the process of self-healing and move forward. This is not to be confused with allowing the oppressors to continue their behavior, but a recognition of the fact that they must be held accountable for their actions toward themselves and others. As this approach is the only true help that such people need, it is an act of mercy and compassion, as well as an obligation.

Tawba *(Repentance)*

Tawba means to return to goodness and amend one's thoughts, feelings, and actions so that he/she can create a new lifestyle (2:37, 2:160, 4:64 and 5:39). At-Tawwāb, one of God's attributes, means that God constantly turns a person's heart toward repentance and accepts it (4:26-27). The first step is intrapersonal: The wrongdoer must face him/herself and admit there is a problem: *And those who, having done something to be ashamed of or wronged their own souls, earnestly bring God to mind, and ask for forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except God?—and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done* (3:135).

The second step is to show regret and repent immediately: "*God accepts the repentance of those who do evil in ignorance and repent soon afterwards. To them will God turn in mercy, for God is full of knowledge and wisdom*" (3:17). This is exemplified by the account of how Ādam and Iblīs wronged themselves. When God created Ādam and commanded the angels and Iblīs to bow to him, Iblīs refused to do so. "God said, 'What prevented you from bowing down as I commanded you?' He replied, 'I am better than him: You created me from fire and him from clay'" (7:12). Iblīs was envious and arrogant and thought only of

revenge. He promised God that he would lure Ādam, his children, and all of their offspring to hellfire with him. But when Ādam and Ḥawwā' were tempted by Iblīs and ate from the forbidden tree, "Their Lord called to them, 'Did I not forbid you to approach that tree? Did I not warn you that Iblīs was your sworn enemy?' They replied, 'Our Lord. We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and have mercy on us, we will certainly be losers'" (7:22-23). They instantly felt shame and regret and sought forgiveness.

The third level of repentance involves two steps: (1) ending the wrongdoing or self-deception immediately and (2) establishing a new lifestyle in which it has no place: "*Those who repent and make amends and openly declare (the truth); to them I turn, for I am Often Returning, Most Merciful*" (2:160). The Qur'an encourages people to "Establish regular prayers at the end of the day and at the approaches of the night. For those things that are good remove those that are evil" (11:114). We have to remember that God – limitless is He in His glory – has no need for His servants or their repentance. When they repent, they benefit only themselves because their lives and that of their community improve and become happy, as explained in Sūra Hūd (11: 3,52,61). Everyone makes mistakes; owning up to them and expressing remorse are the only ways to move forward and keep relationships strong. Anas ibn Mālik reported: The Prophet, peace and blessings be upon him, said, "All of the children of Ādam are sinners, and the best sinners are those who repent."[25] Delivering an effective apology is not always easy, but doing so is essential to maintaining healthy personal and familial connections. A sincere apology shows that one cares about the other person, which helps rebuild trust and opens communication with the wronged person. Furthermore, all wrongdoers must often engage in *kaffāra*, an act of repentance that relieves one from sins or wrong deeds: "If you remain mindful of God, He will give you a criterion of decerning between right and wrong, acquit you from wrong deeds and forgive you" (8:29). 'Uthmān bin 'Affān reported that Prophet Muḥammad said: "When the time for a prescribed prayer is due and a Muslim performs its ablution and its acts of bowing and prostration properly, this prayer will be an expiation for his past sins, so long as he does not commit major sins, and this applies forever."[26]

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[25] *Sunan al-Tirmidhī* 2499, *Mishkat al-Masābīḥ* 2341, Book 9, Hadith 114.
[26] Narrated by Muslim, Book 8, 56. *Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn* 1046.

Kaffāra **(Expiation of Wrong and Reviving the Soul)**[27]

Kaffāra is an important Qur'anic strategy. Defined as an expiation of sin or compensation for an offense, it serves both as an effective system for change and transformation in terms of one's thoughts, behaviors, and actions, as well as an effective mechanism for allowing wrongdoers to develop a moral and spiritual lifestyle. This teaching's significance lies in transforming the soul through good acts that guide Muslims toward moral, spiritual, and social betterment. *Kaffāra* is significant in the healing process for many reasons: It helps the person learn and practice mindfulness and self-awareness in order to purify the soul and mind, stop the toxic self-shame and foster self-compassion. This highlights the Sharia's purpose as being that of guidance, rather than of retribution, and sheds light on the mercy that God fosters for everyone by treating their shortcomings as an opportunity for moral growth and refuge. During the Prophet's time, the first predominant form of *kaffāra* was freeing a slave. *Kaffāra* is required for an accidental homicide, as is *dīyah* (blood-money), which must be paid to the victim's family (4:92-93). While *dīyah* may be forgiven by the victim's family, the *kaffāra* of freeing a slave is required. If this is not possible, the perpetrator must fast for two consecutive months. The consequences of an accidental murder extend beyond violating the family's right; indeed, killing a human being that God created is a serious matter and requires a holistic reformation and purification. The second one is charity, which highlights how violating the Sharia's rules is atoned for by protecting and providing for the needy. The third one is fasting, which purifies the perpetrator's soul so he/she can foster the self-discipline and piety needed to refrain from wrongful actions.

These rulings emphasize God's Compassionate, Just and Merciful Nature–qualities He encourages Muslims to foster among themselves and others by not committing sins that ruin the soul, harm the individual's character, and destroy personal relations. This is where *kaffāra* comes in, for it prevents wrongdoers from permanently hurting their soul and allows Muslims to make amends. The prophetic teaching emphasizes that "when you do a wrong deed, follow it with a good deed and it will wipe it away." The Qur'an emphasizes feeding in general and in the context of *kaffāra*. the Qur'an describes the *abrār* (the pious) as: "And they feed, for the love of God, the poor, the orphan, and the captive; saying to themselves, "We feed you only for the sake of Allah, seeking neither reward nor thanks from you" (76:8-9). This is an important way to heal the soul and replace any negative feelings it has with generosity despite loving wealth.

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[27] This important chapter in *fiqh* provides a comprehensive legal explanation of *kaffāra*. However, this article addresses this issue from the spiritual perspective. One can review the detailed legal/*fiqhī* explanations in the great collections of *fiqhī* books.

Fasting is prescribed for self-discipline and to learn patience, forbearance, perseverance, and steadfastness. Its second goal is to foster empathy for the poor and needy. Self-control is important for wrongdoers because it is an active form of patience and refraining from physical desires that helps foster moral and spiritual resilience. Moreover, it instills a sense of humility in the perpetrator, through which he/she can avoid future sins and acquire hope: "These believers will be given their rewards twice over because they are steadfast, repel evil with good, give to others out of what We have provided for them" (28:54).

The Role of the Family in Preventing *Ẓulm*:

The divine goal of human relations is to promote mutual cooperation, counseling, forbearance, compassion, forgiveness, help, and accountability. This requires people to acquire the moral standards that are acceptable to the Creator so that they can live together in peace. Achieving this goal, therefore, is the family structure's overriding raison d'être. Peace needs to pervade the home, for the family is the society's cornerstone and the starting point for community life. A marriage focused on God is the foundation of a healthy family. While individual people work on developing self-perception and self-understanding, building characters and habits, gaining knowledge of life and increasing in *taqwā* (self-awareness), getting married means putting one's knowledge into practice. Sūra al-Nisā' introduces a comprehensive framework on how to establish a moral, compassionate, and peaceful relationship between the couples and then the community so they can accomplish their mission as God's representatives (*khalīfa*).

The first unit in human existence was the family produced by Ādam and Ḥawwā'. All of humanity is their progeny. The Qur'an uses *nafs* (self) in both the individualistic (2:48) and collective (4:1) sense. The opening verse 4:1 emphasizes that the relationship between "self" and "other," where "other" is seen as an extension of the "self," and not a severed separate entity. The Qur'anic concept of "self" is closely linked to "pair" (*zawj*), as can be seen in many verses, among them: "And God has given you mates of your own kind and has given you, through your mates, children and grandchildren, and has provided for you sustenance out of the good things of life. Will they then believe in falsehood and deny God's favors?" (16:72). The Creator divided humanity into males and females, established mutual affection between them, and prepared them to find tranquility and love in each other. In fact, the Qur'an even defines an Islamic marriage: "And among His signs is this: that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that you may dwell in tranquility with them, and He has put love and mercy between your (hearts). Verily in that are signs for those who reflect" (30:21). In view of this, the Qur'an makes mutual care and mutual

accountability within the family the cornerstone of its system of social care and security.

It is a great responsibility to raise dignified and healthy (physically, mentally, and emotionally) children who, as they grow up, will submit to the Creator and strive to fulfill their purpose: being God's *khalīfa*. Each child, therefore, has the right to grow up in a peaceful home that will help him/her achieve this goal. The family nurtures the children's talents and strengthens their potential. The most profound influences on a person are seen within the home, for it serves as a shelter that gives comfort as well as provides nurturing ties of love, affection, mutual sympathy, and care while observing values that maintain purity and prevent lewdness. Children are to be reared, trained, looked after, and taught within this unit. Relations within the family are to be shown in an atmosphere of love and respect that radiates mutual sympathy and genuine care. Although parents are responsible for raising their children, the extended family's support is crucial in terms of providing psychological and social diversity, as well as companionship, both for them and the parents. This support offers beneficial learning and socialization experiences for the former and the necessary sense of security and usefulness for the latter.[28] As there is less dependence upon one-to-one relationships in such a framework, fewer emotional demands are made upon each member. Even though God gives humanity this ideal framework to uphold in the family, He also guides people through situations of *ẓulm* by identifying the oppressive practices that families and societies have fallen into.

Sūra al-Nisā' begins by emphasizing the rights of orphans, particularly girls, hurt by the very relatives and guardians who were supposed to look after them. Their male guardians, who sought only to quickly consume the orphan's inheritance, often detained young and rich orphaned girls at home until they or one of their sons could marry them. Love was not involved. In such a society the young and vulnerable, as well as widowed women, were wronged and deprived of their rightful share of any inheritance. Strong-bodied male warriors got the largest share, while the weak and vulnerable received insufficient portions.[29] And it was for such miserly shares that these women were detained, for their guardians wanted to make sure that none of their property would fall into the hands of

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[28] Lamya al-Faruqi, "Women, Muslim Society and Islam" (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1994), 40-43. Also see Zainab Alwani, "Muslim Women and Global Challenges: Seeking Change through a Qur'ānic Textual Approach and the Prophetic Model," *Institute of Objective Studies* (New Delhi: Genuine Publications and Media Pvt, 2012).

[29] Sayyid Qutb, *Sūrah al'-Nisā'*.

strangers. As a result, their male-dominated society devalued and mistreated all women throughout their lives.

Women were treated as part of the estate. When a man died, his nearest male kin would throw his robe over the widow to show that he retained her for himself. Furthermore, he could marry her without paying any dowry or marry her off to someone else, in which case he would receive her dowry. In other instances, if a husband no longer wanted his wife, he seemed to be at liberty to mistreat her without any consequences. He could leave her in suspense (i.e., neither married nor divorced) until she bought her freedom with her own money.[30] The Qur'an prohibits taking advantage of the spouse in any way, especially when a relationship has deteriorated to the point of divorce:

> When you divorce women and they are about to fulfill the term of their 'iddah, either retain them back or let them go, but do not retain them to injure them (or) take undue advantage; if anyone does that, he wrongs his own soul. (2:231)

Instead, the Qur'an instructs both spouses to remember any positive aspects or experiences they shared and to honor their shared relationship by respecting and being just to each other: "…the husbands should either retain their wives together on equitable terms or let them go with kindness"(2:229).

The story of Khawla teaches many valuable lessons in this regard by emphasizing *kaffāra* in action. 'Ā'isha recounts the story in the following *ḥadīth saḥīḥ*:

> Blessed is the One Whose hearing encompasses all things. I heard some of the words of Khawla bint Tha'laba, but some of her words were not clear to me, when she complained to the Messenger of God (ﷺ) about her husband: 'O Messenger of God, (ﷺ) he has consumed my youth and I split my belly for him (i.e., bore him many children). But when I grew old and could no longer bear children, he declared *ẓihār* upon me (declared me as unlawful to him as his mother). O God, I complain to You.' She continued to complain until these verses were revealed: 'Indeed God has heard the statement of she who pleads with you (O Muḥammad) concerning her husband, and complains to God.'[31]

God supported Khawla's complaint and banned this unjust custom. After the four verses' revelation, the Prophet said to Khawla, "Command him to free a slave." Khawla replied, "O God's Messenger, he does not have any to free." Then the Prophet said, "Let him fast for two consecutive months." Khawla replied, "By God, he is an old man and cannot fast. Then he said, "Let him feed sixty poor

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[30] Sayyid Qutb, *Sūrah al'-Nisā'*.
[31] *Ṣaḥīḥ ibn Mājah*, Book 10, Hadith 48: Vol. 3, Book 10, Hadith 2063.

people with a *wasq* of dates." Khawla said, "O God's Messenger, by God, he does not have any of that." The Prophet said, "We will help him with a basket of dates." Khawla replied, "And I, O God's Messenger, will help him with another." The Prophet said, "You have done a righteously good thing. So go and give away the dates on his behalf."[32] And she did just that.

Identifying those words and actions that are hurtful are essential to helping people improve themselves. This process requires patience, sacrifice, and compromise, for only such practices can save a damaged relationship. If necessary, a third party should be engaged (4:35). Following the divine guidance laid out in this process will prevent oppression.

Even though many such wrong pre-Islamic practices have died out, the Qur'an's methodology of identifying a problem and presenting a practical solution can be applied to the many abuse-related practices (i.e., emotional, physical, financial, and spiritual) within families today. Women, children, orphans, widows, those facing financial struggles, the differently abled, and those who are vulnerable are still being bullied by people who think they are better. The diseases of arrogance and narcissism remain widespread in homes, schools, places of work, and so on. Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) came as a mercy to the world and to live the Qur'an's teachings so people could identify and abandon their wrongdoing and self-deception.

Muslims are taught that each of them is obliged to stop such people and actions. The family is the first place in which this dangerous disease can be caught and dealt with. Parents who see their sons or daughters practicing self-deception by calling their siblings, friends, or animals (any of God's creations) derogatory names or engaging in backbiting, ridiculing, humiliating, belittling, physical violence against someone are responsible and accountable in front of God to end such transgressions. If every adult in the extended family structure were to help children work through their negative emotions/feelings at a young age and taught them to turn to God when they are hurting, many of the major social injustices would disappear. All family members are responsible for identifying and then stopping any diseases of the heart (e.g., arrogance, greed, stinginess, misery, envy, and jealousy) before they become difficult to control. The family should practice mutual teaching of the truth and counseling: "By the time, surely humanity is in ⌜grave⌝ loss, except or those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and counsel each other to hold on to truth and counsel each other to be steadfast" (103:1-3).

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[32] Ibn Kathīr Ḥafīẓ, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr*, translated by a group of scholars under the supervision of Sheikh Safiur-Rahman Al-Mubarakpuri Dar-us-Salam, Riyadh 2000, Sūrah al-Mujādilah.

Conclusion: Toward Establishing Communal Accountability

The first verse of Sūra al-Nisā’ concludes with the important concept of al-Raqīb (The Watchful, The All-Observing), one of God's Beautiful Names. Al-Raqīb is the observer who keeps watching over something so that nothing will harm it. "*Raqab*,” *raqīb*’s verbal form, means “to keep a close eye on it” so that it will be protected."[33] The concept of al-Raqīb watching over everyone and everything is called *murāqaba*. Muslims must remember 4:1 in terms of connecting accountability and observing: “O humanity, be conscious of your Rabb (Nurturer), who created you from a single soul (*nafs wāḥida*), and from it [of like nature] created its mate, and from the two has spread a multitude of men and women. And remain conscious of God, through Whom you demand your mutual [rights] from one another, and (reverence) the wombs (that bore you). Verily, God is ever watchful over you” (4:1). Practicing *murāqaba* helps one resist oppression, for “not a word does a person utter without having a ˹vigilant˺ observer ready ˹to write it down” (50:18), and develop self-awareness and self-accountability.

Accountability is a foundational principle of a healthy relationship for three reasons: (1) it builds self-awareness and increases the level of *taqwā*. Being accountable for one's actions helps people think of every step they take and why; (2) practicing accountability encourages empathy and compassion by making people think of how their words and actions affect the people around them (49:6, 11, and 12); and (3) it fosters a culture of collaboration when everyone in a relationship agrees to be held accountable. The Qur’an defines this as *awlīyā’*: “The believers, both men and women, support each other; they encourage what is right and forbid what is wrong; they keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; they obey God and His Messenger. God will give His mercy to such people. God is Almighty and Wise” (9:71).

[33] Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wal-Tanwīr*, (Q. 13:33).

Becoming Allies: Introducing a Framework for Intersectional Allyship to Muslim Survivors of Gender-Based Violence

Hasnaa Mokhtar and Tahani Chaudhry

Abstract

Multiple social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter, The Combahee River Collective, Musawah, and #MeToo) have highlighted the systems of oppression (e.g., racism, sexism, Islamophobia, and classism) in this country and globally that have targeted different marginalized groups. The traumatic experiences of gender-based violence (GBV) are compounded by the trauma of a long history of structural violence and the unique experiences of different social identities, including race, religion, and gender. One example in the Muslim American context is how Oyewuwo (2019) analyzes the unique experiences of Black Muslim women seeking help for GBV. Her work illustrates the ways in which these women, growing up in a system of oppression and injustice, shaped their response to GBV by creating patterns in which they endure violence and pain. As a South-Asian-American and an Arab-American researching GBV and working within the field, we ask: how do we, members of the Muslim community, become allies for Muslims experiencing GBV within the context of systematic oppression (in ways that prevent privileged groups from reproducing and maintaining patterns of inequality)?

In this paper, we aim to envision possibilities for our role as allies by looking into the intersection of Islamophobia, racism, sexism, and domestic violence within Muslim communities. We present a theoretical background to some of the existing literature on intersectionality and allyship and provide a framework to combine them. The resulting framework will build off existing social movements and apply these learnings to the context of GBV within the Muslim context. Finally, this framework gives community allies, including faith leaders, activists, and community members, a guideline on the role they play in this critical social issue.

Keywords: Gender-based violence, GBV, intersectionality, allyship

Introduction

When Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin suffocated African American George Floyd to death on May 25, 2020, Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests

against police racism and violence erupted in the United States and globally. At the time, both authors worked at the Peaceful Families Project (PFP), a nonprofit organization seeking to prevent domestic violence in the American Muslim community. PFP issued a solidarity statement with BLM, and our staff and board came together in a virtual discussion to talk about our role as Muslims in speaking up against structural and everyday racism against Black people in America, specifically in the Muslim American community. As the conversation unfolded, we noticed how the coverage of the uproar over Breonna Taylor's violent and sudden death on March 13, 2020, at the hands of Louisville police officers did not equal that of Floyd and others. This phenomenon is not unique, for the deaths of Black women like Rekia Boyd, Michelle Cusseaux, Tanisha Anderson, Shelly Frey, Yvette Smith, Eleanor Bumpurs, and many others due to police violence also received little public attention (Crenshaw et al., 2015; Ritchie, 2017). Chatelain and Asoka (2015) speak up about the unique experiences of Black women with police violence:

> Often, women are targeted in exactly the same ways as men – shootings, police stops, racial profiling. They also experience police violence in distinctly gendered ways, such as sexual harassment and sexual assault. Yet such cases have failed to mold our analysis of the broader picture of police violence; nor have they drawn equal public attention or outrage. (Chatelain & Asoka, 2015, p. 54)

To center and to better understand the lived experiences of Black Muslim American women, PFP invited Assistant Professor Dr. Olubunmi Oyewuwo-Gassikia of Northeastern Illinois University to speak in June 2020 (Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2020). Her pioneering research addresses a gap in the literature that erases the experiences of Black Muslim women. She highlights how intersecting systems of oppression, racism, Islamophobia, and injustice shape their response to gender-based violence (GBV) by creating patterns in which they endure violence and pain. It highlights how these women's identity influences their response to domestic violence and seeking help.

> "…growing up in racism, part of slavery, pain was very real for us – being hit, being hurt, being tortured…you can't fall apart because of that…we can't direct it necessarily at the people that are doing it to us," said one of the participants. (Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2020)

When addressing domestic violence intervention efforts, Oyewuwo-Gassikia (2020) critiqued the overreliance on the criminal justice system because there could be lethal consequences for Black people. She identified policing as a deterrent, as opposed to a solution, to GBV or a suitable way for healing. The fact that policing is used as a primary response to domestic violence requires critical evaluation. During the webinar's question-and-answer session, an attendee asked:

> "How does one overcome the hurdle of trusting authority to speak up? I'm personally Black and living in a racist community and have received racial bias from teachers, the police, adolescent care workers, and people within my own Muslim community," said one of the participants. (Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2020)

In other words: how do we Muslim advocates become better allies in confronting the multiple forms of oppression that impinge on the lives and experiences of diverse Muslim victims and survivors as they deal with and try to heal from violence? We can no longer focus on sexism or patriarchy without thinking about the multiple forms of structural violence. Borrowing Mari Matsuda's (1990) practice of "asking the other question" to reveal the interconnectedness of all forms of subordination:

> When I see something that looks racist, I ask, "Where is the patriarchy in this?" When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, "Where is the heterosexism in this?" When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, "Where are the class interests in this?" Working in coalition forces us to look for both the obvious and non-obvious relationships of domination, helping us to realize that no form of subordination ever stands alone. (Matsuda, 1990, p. 1189)

As a South-Asian American and an Arab-American researching GBV and working within the field, thinking critically of our obligation as allies toward all Muslim individuals experiencing GBV is compounded by structural violence. We reflected on our positionalities and privileges of being light-skinned, middle-class, able-bodied, and highly educated Muslim women. We asked: how do we become allies for Muslims experiencing GBV within the context of systematic oppression in ways that prevent privileged groups from reproducing and maintaining patterns of inequality? In this paper, we aim to envision possibilities for our role as allies by looking into the intersection of Islamophobia, racism, sexism, and domestic violence within Muslim communities. We present a theoretical background to some of the existing literature on intersectionality and allyship and provide a framework to combine them. This intersectional allyship framework will build off existing social movements and apply these learnings to the context of GBV within the Muslim context. Finally, this framework gives community allies, including faith leaders, activists, advocates, service providers, and community members, a guideline on the role they play in this critical social issue.

Intersectionality: A Framework to Address Systems of Oppression

One of the PFP's objectives is to disrupt systems of oppressions that create and perpetuate GBV in the American Muslim community. However, individuals in our community are not impacted simply by one layer of structural violence, but are facing the oppression of multiple interlocking systems, including racism,

ethnocentrism, sexism, Islamophobia, ableism, homophobia, ageism, spiritual abuse, state violence, and many others. Our work cannot simply address one facet of our community's complex experiences. We must incorporate and address how these existing sociopolitical systems, which involve multiple forms of oppression and privilege, shape the experiences of the people served. Muslim survivors of intimate partner violence not only have to battle sexism, but also racism, Islamophobia, immigration discrimination, and countless other systems already in place. To be an effective ally, advocates and organizations must take an intersectional approach while learning from and uplifting ongoing social movements. For example, Bowleg (2012) views intersectionality within the context of public health as inclusive of multiple axes of identities beyond just women of color:

> …my view of intersectionality includes and transcends women of color to include all people whose microlevel and macrolevel experiences intersect at the nexus of multiple social inequalities and is broad enough to include populations who inhabit dimensions of social privilege and oppression simultaneously (e.g., Black heterosexual men; White low-income women). (Bowleg, 2012, p. 7)

Given the increased usage of "intersectionality" as a buzzword, Moradi and Grzanka (2017) emphasize the importance of using it responsibly. They offer a series of guidelines that promote a fuller and more nuanced understanding of and engagement with this concept. This paper will aim to use these guidelines to enhance our understanding and to apply it to our context of the American Muslim community responsibly.

First, in our general understanding, it is critical to "understand and credit the roots of intersectionality in Black Feminist activism and scholarship and its contemporary advancements in Feminist/Women's Studies" (Moradi & Grzanka, 2017). This perspective was developed as a critique of sociopolitical movements, which did not address how multiple forms of oppression and privilege impacted the experiences of individuals (Moradi, 2017). Intersectionality draws its roots from these two sources in response to the single identity politics evident in social movements, such as feminist movement's focus on gender and civil rights movement's focus on race. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) introduced the term to emphasize how this narrow focus in social movements and the separate treatment of race and sex discrimination in U.S. law often rendered Black women and their unique experiences invisible:

> Black women sometimes experience discrimination in ways similar to white women's experiences: sometimes they share very similar experiences with Black men. Yet often they experience double-discrimination—the combined effects of practices which discriminate on the basis of race, and on the basis of sex. And sometimes, they experience

> discrimination as Black women—not the sum of race and sex discrimination, but as Black women… Yet the continued insistence that Black women's demands and needs be filtered through categorical analyses that completely obscure their experiences guarantees that their needs will seldom be addressed. (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 149)

The literature's frequent discussions about the additive and multiplicative effects of systems of oppression carries an assumption: these systems are independent from one another. However, in this passage, Crenshaw (1989) draws attention to those experiences of oppression that are unique to Black women, not as a sum of sexism and racism, but as a unique integration of these interlocking systems. Some scholars have defined this reality as "gendered racism." However, Patricia Hill Collins' (2000) description of intersectionality as a "structural matrix of domination" truly encapsulates the way power is organized in our society and how systems of oppression come together to maintain these power structures. In the context of GBV, a Black female survivor may be reluctant to call the police for help due to her fear and mistrust, which stems from the history of oppression and trauma inflicted on the Black community by the police and other government institutions. This survivor's experience is not simply a sum of racism and sexism in her experience of trauma, but rather a complex reality that is unique to Black women. Black women survivors of GBV are forced to deal with the disadvantages of racism and carceral feminism, which views incarceration as the only solution to GBV, while simultaneously attempting to cope and heal from trauma.

Intersectionality is a framework to understand and critique the existing power structures and the intersecting systems of oppression that keep them in place (e.g., racism, ethnocentrism, nativism, and sexism). However, instead of critiquing institutions and power structures, the burden of change is often placed on marginalized individuals and communities. In a review by Moradi (2017) asking "What are the things considered to be intersecting," intersectionality scholarship tends to focus on the intersecting identities rather than the systems. Similarly, researchers, advocates, and community organizations seeking to help survivors often focus on the individual-level questions rather than system change. For instance, their focus on increasing help-seeking among Black survivors discounts any consideration of the systems of racism and sexism that impact these survivors' experiences and choices. Instead of focusing on socially constructed individual categorization and their experience of oppression and disadvantage, the framework of intersectionality emphasizes focusing on the existing systems of power and their use of social inequality to maintain these power dynamics. In practice, this may look like shifting the focus to combatting carceral feminism, which fosters an overreliance on police and prisons as the solution to GBV, while simultaneously reinforcing state violence on marginalized, particularly Black, communities.

Intersectionality is a useful tool for understanding how the multiple forms of privilege and oppression shape the experiences of our community members; however, it is ultimately rooted in a commitment to social transformation. Moradi and Grzanka's (2017) final guideline is "to draw upon intersectionality's rich history … to enact new ways of doing research, teaching, and practice that embody intersectionality's central commitment to social transformation." Chavez-Duenas et al. (2019) enact this guideline by demonstrating how such a framework can be implemented to bring change to minoritized communities. The authors introduce the HEART (Healing Ethno and Racial Trauma) framework, guided by intersectionality, liberation psychology, and trauma-informed care, to the goal of healing ethno-racial trauma in Latinx immigrant communities. This framework acts as an exemplar to activists, advocates, and communities to avoid falling into the trap of focusing on their immediate and singular goals by prioritizing the need for societal transformation to truly spark change for marginalized individuals and communities. As an organization, PFP works to prevent GBV in Muslim communities; however, we must do so with the commitment to creating societal-level change on the structures that impact the diverse community it serves.

Allyship and Solidarity: Conceptual Roots and Implications

What does it mean to be an ally, and when did the term originate? According to Carlson et al. (2020), the term "ally" first appeared to describe the role men play in advocating against GBV and for gender equality and equity. In the late 18th century, allyship was conceptualized as men's anti-sexism and pro-feminism. The term is also used to refer to solidarity efforts to support the struggle for racial justice (Leonard & Misumi, 2016; Patel, 2011), Indigenous rights (Kluttz et al., 2020; Smith et al., 2016), LGBTQI rights (Pickett & Tucker, 2020), and disabilities rights (Carlson et al., 2020). Scholars and activists have questioned the pros and cons of the term "allyship" and how it can be performative rather than transformative (Kalina, 2020).

Carlson et al. (2020) problematize the terms "ally," "allies," and "allyship," as they have been critiqued by activists and advocates who have called for "an evolution of our collective thinking about what is needed from people privileged by or benefiting from inequalities" (p. 890). This demand to rethink what allyship means is the result of researchers' showing that activists who benefit from discrimination often sustain injustice, intentionally or unintentionally, through their behavior or thinking. For example, Carlson et al. (2020) attest that scholarship examining the movement of men's allyship work has revealed "pedestal effects," or how male allies receive excessive praise and attention for their work, which can reproduce the inequalities they claim to be dismantling. Radke et al. (2020) critique how privileged members of a political movement make themselves the center of attention, thereby ignoring the violence

that occurs against disadvantaged groups. Radke (2020) identifies four distinct categories of factors that drive allyship:

> We propose four primary categories of motivations: (a) *outgroup-focused motivations*, which reflect a genuine interest in improving the status of the disadvantaged group; (b) *ingroup-focused motivations*, which involve support for the disadvantaged group that is conditional upon maintaining the status of their own advantaged group; (c) *personal motivations*, which reflects a desire to benefit oneself and meet personal needs by engaging in action for the disadvantaged group; and (d) *morality motivations*, where action is primarily driven by moral beliefs and a resulting moral imperative to respond. (Radke et al., 2020, p. 292)

Sumerau et al. (2021) also warn against any type of allyship that reproduces patterns of social inequality that blame minorities for their oppression and offers band aid solutions, rather than address the roots of structural and systematic oppression. Often, such allyship is concerned with maintaining, rather than disrupting, the status quo. Looking at tokenistic solidarity in the wake of the Christchurch terrorist attacks in New Zealand in 2019, Mirnajafi and Barlow (2019) describe symbolic solidarity as manifesting itself in ways that anger and shock people confronted by violence, but never translates the same rage into concrete actions to change the course of violence. Although part of the bigger picture, symbolic solidarity is not enough. Mirnajarfi and Barlow (2019) identify the problems with it as, "1) for Muslim people, the distress is ongoing, and 2) these attacks did not occur in a vacuum, and the societal factors that give rise to Western Islamophobia, White nationalism, and intergroup violence have not been eliminated" (p. 47). The authors emphasize the type of solidarity needed to support Muslims, which must encompass ongoing action, regardless of how complicated, hard, or imperfect the work of solidarity might be.

> …tokenistic ally, the words offer comfort and safety, but the actions allow an environment of threat to flourish…The message, for the ally (or the cheating partner, for that matter), is to follow through on promises with action. Hands-on allyship and solidarity, however, is hard. A practical look at how to move beyond tokenistic solidarity must acknowledge this, and deal with the problem head on. (Mirnajafi & Barlow, 2019, p. 49)

A big gap in allyship and solidarity work, as noted in the literature, is the lack of models or praxis of how to implement an intersectional analysis and framework in this type of work (Carlson et al., 2020). Allies have a duty to develop the awareness and create the strategies to address classism, sexism, anti-Blackness, capitalism, and other intersecting forms of oppression, or else they might run the risk of reducing people's experiences with structural and systematic violence to identity politics or problems. "For example, in the context of allyship, statements such as "all women are marginalized/oppressed" whitewash/erase the

imperative of white women's allyship/solidarity with women of color...framing oppressions as interconnected can make multi-movements alliances possible" (Carlson et al., 2020, p. 892).

Offering recommendations to become better allies, Carlson et al. (2020) advise that "ally" must not be a self-adhesive label. Privileged advocates who refer to themselves as such do not always meet the criterion of allyship. In reality, there must be a recognition and reckoning with power within solidarity movements among a movement's advantaged members. As no one is perfect, minoritized individuals are not expecting perfect allyship. However, there must be constant engagement, self-reflection, and implementation. The authors also warn against allies, as opposed to members of the oppressed groups, reclaiming leadership positions within social justice movements, as doing so risks perpetuating power and hierarchical imbalances and inequities.

Intersectional Allyship in the Muslim Community

The need for intersectional allyship is clear in the literature. However, based on our experience in community-based work with GBV, we must take this one step further and develop an intersectional Muslim community-specific allyship framework. When GBV survivors share their story, how do we, as allies, provide them with the support, allyship, and solidarity they need, a response that considers the multiple systems of oppression impacting their experience? To answer this question and provide a guide for individuals, families, and community organizations, we introduce a new framework of intersectional allyship, one that uses the allyship themes operationalized by Carlson et al. (2020) and incorporates strategies of healing from the HEART framework (Chavez-Dueñas et al., 2019). Based on these frameworks, our multi-level engagement approach emphasizes the need for support at the individual, family, and community levels of society.

1. Constant Action of the "Everyday Ally"

Individual

Carlson et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of proving and demonstrating allyship via constant action and engagement. Specifically, allyship with GBV survivors may look like support and assistance with basic needs (e.g., economic relief, housing, childcare, and physical and mental health resources). It is particularly important for an ally to consider the different systems of oppression that may be at play. For example, a survivor who has recently immigrated to the country may need additional support navigating unfamiliar governmental systems. Similarly, GBV survivors may benefit from the allies' constant efforts to normalize, address, and challenge their self-blaming statements and help them develop self-care and safety plans. Muslim survivors may have internalized

negative beliefs, such as being punished by God for resisting. Therefore, allies must be able to provide corrective education on Islam's stance on victims of abuse and oppression. Allies can have a major impact by connecting with Muslim survivors based on Muslim values, such as communicating respect, compassion, and care. Furthermore, emphasizing the connection of one *ummah* and feeling each other's pain can foster empathy, understanding, connectedness, and belonging for those who may be feeling isolated due to abuse tactics.

Family

Allyship at this level can be impactful for GBV survivors who may feel disconnected, isolated, and ostracized by their families. First, allies must strengthen, maintain, and repair any attachment disruptions caused by GBV by believing the survivors and validating their emotional experience. Families can benefit from dedicating time to express emotions and communicate with each other openly. Family allies should provide stability for survivors in the family unit and allow and encourage them to maintain healthy boundaries, as needed. Finally, allies may benefit from building networks with other families for support and connection across experiences.

Community

At this level, that of mosques or other large-scale gatherings, allyship can look like awareness, education, and community work. In terms of awareness, Muslim communities must acknowledge both the experience and impact of violence within themselves. Community allies must highlight the systems of oppression and other dynamics at play, among them sexism, racism, classism, and gendered Islamophobia. One concrete way of doing so is to emphasize that violence happens in every community, regardless of social identity. This allows us to avoid reinforcing stereotypes about any particular community. Furthermore, allies must constantly combat these stereotypes to break down prejudiced narratives such as gendered Islamophobia, which states that Muslim women are oppressed and Muslim men are inherently violent. Finally, community organizations and spaces can demonstrate their allyship by creating safe spaces in which community members can share their experiences without judgment and receive support from the community. For example, create a mission statement about not tolerating any form of violence and state clearly how you will combat it. Or, pass the mic to underrepresented members. For example, Kayla Renée Wheeler (2020) writes that Black Muslim women are often the last to be called upon to take formal leadership roles. "When Black Muslim women do take centerstage, they often face vitriol, with little public support from anyone except other Black Muslim women" (Wheeler, 2020).

2. Prioritize a Structural Analysis of Oppression and Privilege

Individual

According to Edwards (2006, p. 51), ideal allies "see the interconnectedness of forms of oppression and recognize how limiting it can be to see strategies addressing one form of oppression in isolation." As the different systems of oppression at play are inseparable, allies who analyze them in isolation from each other develop blind spots to the reality of oppression. Thus, allies on the individual level need to educate themselves about historical injustices and the root causes of oppression, and then develop and implement a critical consciousness. Self-reflection and education are not the end goal, but rather means to fuel action and transformative change that disrupt systems of oppression and structural violence. Some strategies to do this include speaking up and taking action when you see oppression, injustice, and abuse. This is the embodiment of Islamic values, as Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) said, "Whosoever of you sees an evil action, let them change it with their hand; and if they are not able to do so, then with their tongue; and if they are not able to do so, then with their heart—and that is the weakest of faith" (*Sahih Muslim*). The Muslim faith compels us to uphold justice and not remain silent, which is the foundation of allyship. Taking action requires that we acknowledge and utilize our privilege in certain systems. For instance, there may be spaces in the Muslim community in which men have the voice and power that women do not. As an ally, Muslim men have to acknowledge this privilege and utilize it to amplify the voices, experiences, and needs of Muslim women.

Family

Families may have multiple overlapping axes of systemic oppression; however, each family member may also have unique experiences. At this level, allyship can assume the form of connecting across axes of oppression as well as respecting, acknowledging, and highlighting the different systems of oppression that a family member may be facing. Families may connect over the shared experience of immigrant stress and intergenerational trauma from state surveillance, while also acknowledging that brothers and sisters navigate the community and systems differently due to sexism, or a parent and child's experience of the world due to ableism. As allies, we can amplify the voices and struggles of those around us and direct the family's energy and resources to the unique needs of family members suffering from these forces. The family unit can help process the effects of GBV, its impact on the family unit, and its members' relationships in a culturally and religious relevant manner.

Community

Faith leaders, activists, and community organizations can implement allyship on this level by educating their respective audiences on the structural analysis of privilege and oppression and prioritizing these conversations in the community agenda. Community allies can create educational programs to teach the history of oppressed groups in creative ways (e.g., workshops, presentations, panels, art exhibits, and movie screenings) to disseminate information about White supremacy, oppression, and its impact on communities of color, thereby facilitating community engagement and attendance. Allies must also amplify the voices of those suffering, rather than speaking for them. South Asian and Arab American communities, which have traditionally excluded and discriminated against Black and African American Muslims, must address this deep-rooted racism and oppression and its impact on survivors. This problem will not be addressed by holding events on Hazrat Bilal during Black History Month. Instead, the Muslim community must acknowledge and address the deep-rooted anti-Blackness in many Arab and Asian communities and learn the history and function of anti-Blackness in our communities. Beyond reflection and introspection, the Muslim community must address this gap and fill these spaces with Black voices and representation. This ongoing exclusion makes it impossible for Black and other marginalized group survivors to access resources, support, and assistance when experiencing GBV. Finally, community allies can provide concrete information to help community members become aware of, process, and cope with GBV-related symptoms, such as factsheets, culturally relevant toolkits (e.g., fotonovelas and infographics), describing trauma-related symptoms, and how to seek additional resources (e.g., psychotherapy).

3. Welcome Criticism and Accountable Self-Reflection

Individual

This guideline combines two themes from Carlson et al. (2020): "Non-self-Absorbed and Accountable Self-Reflection" and "Welcome Criticism and be Accountable." It emphasizes the spirit of allyship as a constant learning process. No one is born the perfect ally, and thus becoming an effective ally means that one must be open to growth and change. On an individual level, allies should welcome criticism and reflect upon their beliefs, thoughts, words, and actions. Educate yourself so that your knowledge and understanding is constantly evolving and improving. Be non-defensive so that you can both accept and seek criticism and constructive feedback, particularly from victims and marginalized communities. If you are called out for victim blaming, racism, or any other manifestation of internalized oppression, do not excuse or justify your behavior. Rather, engage with your blind spots and implicit biases and fill in the gaps in

your knowledge. However, one must go beyond self-reflection and be held accountable for their mistakes. Apologize for them and take action to heal and provide support and resources for any deliberate or inadvertent harm you may have caused. Finally, Carlson et al. (2020) highlight the negative impacts of guilt and shame. Allies must "resist giving into guilt because it is paralyzing," "self-indulgent," and centers the ally while removing one's attention from the victims and their needs (Carlson et al., 2020, p. 893).

Family

At this level, welcoming criticism and accountable self-reflection can look like acknowledging different opinions and understanding that your way is not the only right way. In fact, as an ally, you can reflect on your opinions and whether they are rooted in privilege. For example, a family member may be pushing a survivor to stay in an abusive relationship for various reasons, including not personally experiencing such a relationship's physical and psychological impact, the normalization of abuse, the fear of negative consequences based on cultural expectations, and shame. However, if the abuse escalates and the negative consequences become clear, as an ally a family member must self-reflect on one's privileges, how they impact your decisions, and seek to alleviate any harm caused by your actions and ensure the survivor's safety and wellbeing. Family members must understand that their words and actions carry weight and may impact the survivor negatively. For instance, asking "What did you do to make your partner angry?" and similar questions can place the blame on the victim and further damage their emotional wellbeing and disempower them. Many Muslim families prioritize their reputation and honor. As an act of allyship, families must prioritize justice and the survivor's wellbeing. In fact, silencing the survivor's experience can have a detrimental impact on the family by making its members unable to access community resources and support. In such a case, its members will be left alone to cope with and heal from the trauma of GBV.

Community

Institutions, mosques, and organizations must have clear guidelines on which behaviors will and will not be tolerated. They can remain true to these values by holding all violators, regardless of their position or status, accountable. How should the mosque deal with a board member accused of perpetrating violence at home, or an imam or sheikh who abuse their position to control and use those who trust them? Having such guidelines in place will let people know what to do when such situations arise. This sets a precedent of holding each other accountable and calling out the abusive actions and behaviors that you witness. Furthermore, making such policies clear to the community in advance demonstrates solidarity and support to survivors, who may then feel more empowered to speak up. The

community should take responsibility for the survivors' safety and follow steps to recognize the harm done and ways to heal from that harm. These steps can follow the process of transformative justice, which involves the community, the perpetrator, and the victim repairing the harm done, hold the perpetrator accountable, and prevent harm from happening in the future. This process is built on the foundational idea of the criminal legal system's injustice and the harm it has done to the Black, immigrant, and Muslim communities with state-sanctioned violence, surveillance, and oppression.

4. Listen+Shut Up and Amplify Marginalized Voices

Individual

This guideline also combines two themes from Carlson et al. (2020): "Listen+Shut Up+Read" and "Amplify Marginalized Voices." Given that the allies' main responsibility is to de-center their voice and experience of privilege in order to center those of the marginalized, they must "avoid the spotlight" by being quiet and listening to those who are suffering (Carlson et al. 2020, p. 893). De-centering yourself means to fulfill and uplift the needs of those you are allying yourself to, as opposed to boosting your own ego and feeding a savior complex. Specific actions in this regard include reminding yourself that you are a) "not speaking for," b) "not speaking over," and c) "not speaking first" (Carlson et al. 2020, p. 893). In short, do not speak over or for a GBV survivor's experiences. If survivors share their distrust of the police, it is not your place to defend the legal system. If they discuss their experience with an abusive partner, it is not your place to share your experience with this person. Finally, in the Muslim community, it can be beneficial to engage with Islamic frameworks when dealing with gender equity, racial justice, and immigrant rights. Connect with other allies and organizations, such as MuslimARC (Anti-Racism Collaborative), doing this work through an Islamic lens and uplift it.

Family

At this level, this guideline may look like uplifting the voices and choices of those who may not have as much power and privilege as you do in the family dynamics. Do not tamp down on the family members' voices, experiences, and choices. As an ally and as a Muslim, we must understand the Islamic rights of each member (including children) and not enforce our own beliefs and choices onto them.

Community

At this level, we can enact allyship by amplifying the marginalized groups' voices in multiple tangible ways. Firstly, mosques and organizations should seek diversity across multiple identities (e.g., race, gender, and nationality) and

experiences (e.g., GBV survivors) in their board membership and leadership. Doing so will ensure inclusive decision-making processes and center the voices of those affected by the decision. For instance, survivors' voices would be crucial on a board that is considering appointing a known abuser. While it is important to ensure accurate representation of the diverse Muslim community in positions of power, it is simultaneously important to avoid tokenizing the marginalized. Do not have one female board member to represent all of the community's women, or one Black person to represent the entire Black Muslim community. Tokenistic representation places undue burdens on the member to represent their whole group, which is impossible. Another avenue to amplify and center these marginalized voices is to host community-wide events to learn about its GBV survivors' experiences. Further, it is crucial for community organizations, institutions, and mosques to tangibly support these marginalized communities' contributions. As allies, communities must create funding opportunities to support the work, activism, and advocacy of those marginalized people.

Conclusion

When the Black Lives Matter protests peaked in 2020, half a million people showed up in nearly 550 places across America (Buchanan et al., 2020). Hundreds of institutions issued statements in solidarity with the protests condemning state violence against Black people. Various Muslim organizations wrote about and publicized their anger and resentment of how Black people are targeted, dehumanized, and murdered. But after the uproar calmed down, many went back to business as usual without thinking very deeply about how to implement the words expressed in these solidarity statements. Within networks of Muslim American advocates against GBV, members of different organizations engaged in conversations about how to address the urgent need to confront and fight structural racism and classism within the Muslim American community.

But conversations alone are not enough. This paper aims to provide a framework for the Muslim community to take action. We introduce a model of intersectional allyship that addresses the question: how do we, as Muslim advocates, become better allies in confronting the multiple forms of oppression that impinge on the lives and experiences of diverse Muslim victims and survivors as they deal with and try to heal from violence? This framework is built on the extant literature on intersectionality and allyship and applied to our community's unique needs and experiences. Recommendations are provided for the individual, family, and community levels to encourage engagement with intersectional allyship to incite both top-down and bottom-up change.

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Punishment, Child Abuse, and Mandated Reporting

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Abstract

Child abuse may take multiple forms, such as neglect and physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. In the US, physical abuse is considered a crime and, according to the law, must be reported by those working in numerous professions, among them that of mental health. Failing to report child abuse can have legal and professional repercussions. Corporal punishment (CP), a common disciplinary practice in many cultures and households, may be difficult to distinguish from child abuse. Additionally, perspectives on corporal punishment vary among cultures and may find justifications in religious traditions. Therefore, addressing it in clinical practice is surrounded by ethical and professional challenges.

This paper explores the challenges and ideals of addressing CP and physical abuse according to the perspectives of Islam and professional clinical practice, with a particular focus on the American Muslim context. After exploring the Islamic worldview on parenting and CP, the paper will explore ethical dilemmas facing clinicians with regard to reporting child abuse and offer practical recommendations informed by the Islamic tradition and the existing literature on the topic.

Keywords: Islam, child abuse, mandated reporting, corporal punishment, parenting, ethics

Introduction

Parenting and child-rearing is a task laden with responsibility, joy, and challenges. Across cultures, various disciplinary approaches are central to raising and educating children. Despite research showing the negative impacts of physical disciplinary approaches such as corporal punishment (CP), they remain prevalent and extremely common across nations and cultures. CP practices (e.g., spanking, slapping, smacking, hitting, and pinching) are potentially injurious, and the relevant literature is replete with cases ranging from injury to death, not to mention psychological injuries. Nonetheless, parents and teachers may justify its usage as effective and religiously or culturally sanctioned.

This paper explores the challenges and ideals of addressing CP and physical abuse according to the perspectives of Islam and professional clinical practice, with a particular focus on the American Muslim context. This topic lies at the interface of culture, mental health, religion, and law. After examining its prevalence globally and in Muslim communities, as well as exploring international efforts to prevent violence against children, the paper will look at the relationship among CP, child abuse, and faith. It will then present the Islamic perspective on CP along with some of the ethical dilemmas facing clinicians with regard to their legal obligation to report suspected child abuse. Finally, two case vignettes will be offered to present practical recommendations informed by the Islamic tradition and the existing literature on the topic.

The Prevalence of Corporal Punishment

Corporal punishment, a physical form of child discipline, may be defined as a form of training aimed at reinforcing desired habits, developing self-control, establishing behavioral boundaries, and cultivating positive social and religious conduct (WHO, 2006; VandenBos, 2015). It includes the use of physical punishment and force, such as spanking, to cause pain – but not injury – for disciplinary purposes (VandenBos, 2015). If CP becomes too harsh, it may cross the limits and be considered abusive punishment, which may be defined as the "use of excessive physical force to discipline a child that results in bodily injury, including noticeable marks, bruises, cuts, or welts; such punishment includes beating, burning, or tying up a child" (VandenBos, 2015, p.5).

This type of punishment is a rampant global phenomenon. A large data set from low- and middle-income countries showed that three in four children aged between two and fourteen have experienced violent discipline, half of which was physical in nature. Seventeen percent of children experience severe forms of punishment (UNICEF, 2010). In the United States, despite continuous debates and decreasing rates of approval, previous studies show that the majority of parents use some form of CP for disciplinary purposes (Fontes, 2005; Brundage, 2008; Straus & Donnelly, 2017).

Studies from around the Muslim world indicate an alarming prevalence of violence toward children. A study conducted in Saudi Arabia indicated that 20-45% of Saudi children, primarily between the ages of 12-18, are consistently exposed to violence, predominantly physical violence. Children in the study were exposed to slapping and violent beating (Khuja, 2011; Al-Zahrani, 2004). In the United Arab Emirates, a national study found that 6 out of 10 acts of violence toward children – pinching, hair-pulling, kicking, and shoving – happen at home and are done by other family members. A full 25% of the children reported feeling frightened in their own homes.

Emotional neglect also seemed to be a prevalent phenomenon (Al-Khatib, 2013, as cited in Awaisha, 2017). In Algeria, a national report published in 2012 revealed that 86% of children experience some form of emotional or physical violence. A study that included 300 parents indicated that the majority of them use CP; however, mild to moderate CP dominated the sample. Algerian forensic reports in 2012 revealed that nearly 6,000 children were victims of violence that resulted in physical injury and/or death in a few cases (Awaisha, 2017). In Pakistan, similar CP-related deaths have been reported, as well as CP victims committing suicide (Holden & Ashraf, 2016). In Egypt, nearly 90% and 40% of children in a study sample experienced beating at home and at school, respectively (Zayed, 2007, as cited in Muhammad et al., 2018).

Among the 33 countries surveyed by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) regarding household disciplinary practices, only the majority of parents from Muslim-majority Syria and Sierra Leone considered physical punishment as necessary in child-rearing. Nonetheless, violent physical discipline was commonly practiced among households from all the countries surveyed, with the highest prevalence occurring among children aged 5-9. Yemen, one of the countries that ranked highest globally with regard to violent discipline, had rates of psychological aggression exceeding 90% and physical punishment as high as 86% (psychological aggression refers to shouting, yelling, or calling a child offensive names). In a study that compared data from six European countries, Turkey and Lithuania ranked the highest with regard to the use of physical punishment (Durivage et al., 2015). In Iran, a systematic review conducted during 2014 revealed that the cumulative prevalence of child physical abuse in both genders was 43.5% (Mohammadi et al., 2014). The above figures are troubling and raise many questions regarding the possible reasons as well as the consequences of such a prevalent practice.

Global and National Efforts to Protect Children Against Violence

In an attempt to protect children's rights, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989, which later became one of the most widely ratified human rights conventions. The CRC stipulates comprehensive measures to protect children against all forms of violence and abuse, including "violent or other cruel or degrading forms of discipline" (UNICEF, 2010; United Nations OHCHR, 1990). It is noteworthy that the United States is the only country that, to date, has not ratified it.

Among the CRC's recommendations is to support the protection of children through legislation and education. There is a strong global push for legally prohibiting all forms of CP for children. As of 2021, 62 countries had adopted this recommendation. This is a significant increase from the total of 29 countries in 2010. Corporal punishment in schools, in particular, is legally banned

in 135 countries as of 2021 (End Corporal Punishment, n.d.). Most Muslim-majority countries banned it only in specific settings. UNICEF collaborated with Muslim governments and religious authorities to promote children's well-being through research, education, and training. Parenting-training programs were delivered in Jordan, Yemen, and other Muslim countries. UNICEF launched multi-disciplinary working groups with religious authorities in Egypt, Iran, and Mauritania. These efforts yielded landmark publications and fatwas by these reputable authorities emphasizing children's rights to be protected against violence (Robinson, 2010; UNICEF, 2010).

The United States' Child Protective Services (CPS), a governmental agency located in each state, is dedicated to protecting the rights and needs of children. The agency has been the source of much scrutiny: criticized for tampering with parents' autonomy to raise their children, as well as being accused of not doing enough to protect children, as highlighted in multiple sensationalized cases over the past several decades.

To better understand the current American system, one needs to explore the child welfare system's history. Child abuse and maltreatment have been an area of social concern since the late 1800s. Prior to 1874, no laws mandated the humane treatment of children and they had no rights. Thus, child maltreatment was rampant, and they were often exploited by working long hours in factories. In 1874, the case of Mary Ellen McCormack, a 10-year-old girl who was beaten daily by her foster mother, attracted attention. The concerned neighbors were unable to find any agency that would help her. At that point Etta Angell Wheeler, her assigned investigator, sought help from the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA). The founder hired an attorney to take this case to the New York State Supreme Court, which freed Mary Ellen by placing her in a residential facility. Later on, Ms. Wheeler adopted her. This case led to the founding of the New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC) in 1874, the world's first child protective organization (Markel, 2009).

In various states, for the next 90 years the SPCC remained the leading non-governmental agency advocating for protecting children from maltreatment. The early 1900s gave rise to juvenile courts, and by the 1960s the government assumed this task. During this time, doctor training programs included training on how to identify child abuse and neglect. Child abuse-reporting laws, introduced in 1963, mandated that medical professionals report their suspicions. State registries and reporting hotlines to track incidents of abuse began to be logged. Over the years, the list of mandated reporters was expanded to include the police, school staff, the clergy, mental health providers, medical providers, and district attorneys (Myers, 2008).

In 1974, the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act established state agencies to investigate cases of suspected child maltreatment. In 2018, the Family First Prevention Act was passed, providing funding for preventive programs to reduce the incidence of child removal and foster care placement (Family First Act, 2019). Preventive or community response programs are designed to help reduce family stressors and the number of referrals to CPS. Today, CPS agencies include various units such as the reporter hotline, the investigative unit, emergency children's services, preventive programs, foster care programs, and adoption services.

Understanding Child Abuse: Prevalence, Definitions, Impact

The task of assessing the nature of physical discipline is rather challenging, as no single benchmark differentiates child abuse from physical discipline (Coleman et al., 2010). Various factors come into play, including parental background; psychosocial stressors; and the child's mental, physical, and emotional states, along with age and size. The fear of harsh consequences, among them the cancellation of parental authority, the potential removal of the child, and the disruption of the family unit, also impacts the decision to report a suspected incident, especially among people of color. Mandated reporters often fear filing reports, despite the risk of loss of licensure. Therefore, it is important to discuss child abuse insofar as it enables clinicians to identify what it is not.

Nationwide, in 2018 it was reported that CPS processed 4.3 million allegations of abuse or neglect involving 7.8 million children. Nearly 56% of these reports warranted investigation by CPS, and 4.8% of the children were involved in cases that indicated abuse. Overall, about 1% of US children were determined to have suffered maltreatment. Among the investigated cases, 22.9% of victims and 1.9% of non-victims (such as siblings) were placed in foster care (Slack & Berger, 2021).

There are three main types of child abuse, namely, physical, sexual, and neglect. *Physical abuse* is the intentional infliction of "serious physical injury," such as shaking, beating, burning, biting, or hitting with objects. This also includes circumstances in which parents would allow others to abuse their children. Physical abuse often leaves evidence in the form of bruising, scars, burns, and broken/fractured bones. *Sexual abuse* includes "incest, rape, obscene sexual performance, fondling a child's genitals, intercourse, sodomy, and any other contact such as exposing a child to sexual activity, or commercial sexual exploitation such as prostitution of a minor or production of pornographic materials involving a minor" (NYC Administration for Children's Services, n.d.). *Child neglect* is defined as "the failure of a parent or caretaker to provide needed food, clothing, shelter, medical care, or supervision to the degree that the child's health, safety, and well-being are threatened with harm." Neglect may include:

> [The] failure to support a child's educational needs either by excessive unexcused absences, by failing to communicate with a child's educational needs despite the school's outreach to the parent; by failing to provide adequate food, clothing, or shelter; by failing to provide medical or mental health care; by leaving a child alone without adequate supervision; by leaving a child with someone that does not have the capacity to appropriately supervise or protect the child, or without planning for the provision for food, clothing, education, or medical care; or by subjecting a child to humiliation, fear, verbal abuse, or extreme criticism, exposing a child to family violence or caregiver substance abuse that can compromise the well-being of the children. (NYC Administration for Children's Services, n.d.)

Child abuse can produce short-term and long-term effects. Physical abuse can impact brain functioning, including the ability to process emotions, memory and learning issues, and difficulty with decision making and emotional regulation. In addition, short-term effects may include anxiety, depression, acting out in violence and anger (which can lead to juvenile delinquency), separation anxiety disorder, sleep disturbance, low self-esteem, poor academic functioning, social withdrawal and isolation, guilt, fear, and shame. Over time, physical abuse can cause increased rates of suicidality, depression, substance abuse, difficulty in forming healthy attachments, PTSD, and juvenile and adult criminal activity (Wilderman et al., 2014). Moreover, individuals who were abused as children are more likely to become abusive adults (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020). Such trauma can also manifest via increased health risks in adulthood, including an increased risk of diabetes, heart diseases, and other chronic illnesses (Sonu et al., 2019). The Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Study, initially published in 1998, was one of the largest and most widely recognized studies that confirmed the short- and long-term negative impacts of all forms of child abuse on physical and menal health (Felitti, 1998).

Mandated Reporting and its Outcome

Both members of the general public and mandated reporters can report suspected abuse and neglect. Mandated reporters, generally defined as any adult who regularly works with children, are expected to file a report when there is a reasonable cause to believe that a child is at risk of maltreatment (Fontes, 2005). Reportable incidents include child fatalities, physical abuse (e.g., burns, lacerations, welts, fractures, swelling, dislocation, excessive corporal punishment, and internal injuries), neglect (e.g., inadequate guardianship, lack of supervision, malnutrition, failure to thrive, abandonment, inadequate food/clothing/shelter), educational neglect, medical neglect, sexual abuse, parental substance abuse, and child substance abuse (New York State, 2020).

Mandated reporters are only required to report incidents of *suspected* abuse, whereas the CPS investigators are responsible for investigating and determining whether abuse has occurred. These cases are then presented in family court, where CPS can present recommendations, which can include an unfounded indication, where the case is closed, with the offer of voluntary preventive programs. In cases where maltreatment has been determined, a family can be offered programs while under CPS supervision. If this is ineffective or if there is severe abuse, children can be placed in foster care. Attempts are made to provide the least disruptive move for the child, and hence a search will be conducted to determine if a family or community member, or a neighbor, can care for the child (kinship placement). If no other supports are available, CPS will place the child in foster care. In certain states, such as New York, the parents have 18 months to complete the necessary programs (e.g., parenting, anger management, and substance abuse classes, individual therapy [for both the parent and the child], and family therapy), before developing a family reunification plan. During this period, parents have the right to initial weekly supervised visitation. As they show improvement, they can have unsupervised visitation per the judge's order until the court rules that it is safe for the child to return home.

Most CPS reports are filed against parents living in poverty; however, "Differentiating neglect from poverty is a rather difficult and subjective judgment" (Font & Maguire-Jack, 2020, p.28). The difficulty of low-income parents to provide financially for their children while often working multiple jobs and long hours, as well as to meet their physical, emotional, and educational needs, has become more challenging. In response, CPS agencies in many states have added preventive programs to provide high-risk families with services, such as case management, for advocacy and to connect them with welfare, food stamps, medical insurance, childcare allowances, financial allowances to secure furniture, and pay rent arrears. In addition, these programs can help families connect with medical, substance abuse, and mental health treatment, as necessary.

Physical Abuse vs. Corporal Punishment

Legally, the majority of states do not prohibit parents from using physical forms of discipline. However, all states have statutes that address child abuse. As a result, state laws are not very helpful in distinguishing between corporal punishment and child abuse (Coleman et al., 2010; Fontes, 2005). Incidents of corporal punishment can vary by nature and degree. Relying on the parents' reports of their disciplinary approaches further obscures this distinction. Factors taken into consideration when delineating CP from physical abuse include:

- The child's age, size, and developmental stage. Was the physical intervention age-appropriate?

- The incidence of the child's intellectual, developmental, or mental disabilities. This can heighten the level of emotional distress caused by corporal punishment.
- The parents' cognitive, mental, and emotional state. Do they have any developmental disabilities or mental illnesses that impact their parenting abilities? Are they connected to their own treatment? How does non-compliance impact their children's care?
- The manner as well as the pattern and/or frequency of discipline. Did the physical intervention cause bodily harm or mental distress?
- Is the disciplinary technique utilized normative to the parents' ethnicity or cultural background? If it is not normative to the child's upbringing (e.g., immigrant parents whose child is born and bred in the United States), what impact will this have on the child?

This complexity may place a burden on mandated reporters in terms of determining whether a case of corporal punishment should be reported or not. Although CPS workers are responsible for conducting the investigation, such a situation may sometimes place the reporters in an ethical conundrum.

Psychologists continue to debate and discuss CP's effectiveness as a disciplinary approach and its potential harm. In a large-scale meta-analysis published in 2002, Gershoff investigated the associations between parents' use of CP and their children's behaviors and experiences across their lifespan. These included the quality of the child's relationship with the parents; the co-occurrence of physical abuse; the child's immediate compliance, mental well-being, criminal behaviors; and the child's later abuse of their own children and spouse. Although the study highlighted many negative associations, it did highlight one reason for CP's continued use: its strong effect on bringing about the child's immediate compliance. Many factors mediate its short- and long-term impacts, including the punishment's frequency and severity and the overall quality of the parent-child relationship. Gershoff's study triggered an academic debate: Some scholars opposed a blanket ban on all forms of physical punishment, including mild to moderate spanking, and others argued that spanking, based on the available scientific evidence, is not to be customarily linked to abuse (Gershoff & Larzelere, 2002; Gershoff, 2002; Baumrind et al., 2002).

Others attempted to offer a somewhat balanced view. Graziano (1994) suggested viewing violent disciplinary practices along a continuum. Light physical disciplinary practices that no one considers abusive fall on one end, whereas extreme practices that almost everyone considers abusive and that may result in serious harm up to death fall on the other end. The difficulty here lies in deciphering those practices lying between these two extremes, for people may vary in their perception and acceptance of them. Interestingly, most physical abuse cases begin as CPs used for disciplinary purposes that cross the line. One

reason for this is that milder CPs gradually lose their effectiveness, which results in lesser forms of non-physical punishments becoming less effective as well. Thus, as the use of CP increases, so does the possibility of physical abuse (Fontes, 2005; Graziano, 1994). As Zolotor et al. (2011) put it: "The most serious unintended consequence [of CP] is physical child abuse. Parents who rely on CP are more at risk for physical child abuse" (as cited in Holden & Ashraf, 2016, p.60).

Child Abuse and Faith

The role of religious beliefs in determining maltreatment and neglect varies by state. Thirty-four states allow adults to refuse medical treatment for themselves and their children for religious reasons, and six states offer a religious exemption to manslaughter charges in cases of child abuse (Sandstorm, 2016). The goal of such laws is to respect the parents' religious freedom. On the other hand, the 1944 case of Prince v. Massachusetts established that parents are obliged to provide appropriate care for their children. In this case, when the aunt and custodian of nine-year-old Betty Simmons, who was expected to work by selling the faith-based magazine "Watch Tower," was approached by the authorities, the guardian stated: "[N]either you nor anybody else can stop me ... This child is exercising her God-given right and her constitutional right to preach the gospel, and no creature has a right to interfere with God's commands." The Supreme Court ruled: "Parents may be free to become martyrs themselves. But it does not follow they are free, in identical circumstances, to make martyrs of their children before they have reached the age of full and legal discretion when they can make that choice for themselves" (Supreme Court of the United States, 1944).

Parents who cite religious justifications to physically discipline their children may do so at their discretion, for example, stating that it is their responsibility to use any means to keep their children on God's path or that the only way to cure their devil-possessed children is to "beat the devil out of them." Such religion-based abuse can often be more harmful than non-religiously motivated child abuse, and its impact could include increased depression, suicidality, phobias, social withdrawal, aggression, and dissociative disorders (Bottoms et al., 2015). Although religion, more often than not, can provide children and families with multiple developmental and psycho-social benefits, it has also been used to justify any harm inflicted on children. Overall, the relationship between faith and child maltreatment is one that requires careful examination (Heimlich, 2011).

Islamic Perspectives on Parenting and Discipline

The Islamic Worldview on Parenting

From an Islamic perspective, the ultimate goal of parenting is to develop conscientious, moral, and spiritual individuals who abide by Islam's normative religious teachings, propagate goodness, and promote growth and prosperity on Earth. Islamic scriptures offer parents the relevant guidance and insights to accomplish this arduous task. As parents embark on this daunting journey, they discover that this guidance begins with encouraging potential spouses to base their choices on religiosity and morality and address all stages of parenting, from the etiquette of intimacy to caring for newborns and infants, to teaching young children morals and etiquette and practicing rituals and acts of worship before reaching the age of puberty. In short, a parent or an educator can find numerous tools within Islamic texts for rearing upright children.

Islamic teachings emphasize the parents' great responsibility toward their children and their upbringing. The scriptures use terms such as *protect*, *shepherd*, *teach*, and *command.* Parents are commanded to protect themselves and their household from committing actions that will be punished in the Hereafter (Quran 66:6). They are perceived as shepherds, entrusted with guiding and directing those for whom they are responsible, as is evident in the prophetic saying: "Every one of you is a guardian and every one of you is responsible (for his herd) … a man is a guardian of his family and responsible (for them); a wife is a guardian of her husband's house and she is responsible (for it) … Beware! All of you are guardians and are responsible (for your herds)" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 67, Hadith 122). This responsibility includes ensuring that their children are both spiritually and morally upright and cared for as regards their physical, mental, and psychological needs.

Numerous prophetic traditions entrust parents with their children's early spiritual education and religious development, which requires teaching and commanding them to do good, avoid evil, and practice good manners. Parents are also seen as spiritual mentors who are responsible for teaching their children the importance of fulfilling religious obligations and guiding them back to the straight path if they go astray. Ample textual support indicates this duty, and classical scholars like Al-Ghazali (d. 1111 CE) also emphasize that parents are responsible for training their children to have good character and conduct so that they will prosper in this life and the Hereafter (Al-Ghazali, 2004). While these parental duties may seem daunting and like an immense responsibility, Islamic teachings also highlight that this responsibility is carried out within a framework of mercy.

Islamic teachings demonstrate that the overarching principles in this regard is gentleness and compassion. Fundamentally, children should be treated with mercy and gentleness, as various prophetic traditions encourage kindness and warn

against violence and harshness. Adopting this principle enables parents to weigh the benefits and harms of their discipline and to keep the child's best interest in mind. The Prophet said, "You should be kind and lenient and beware of harshness and coarseness" when teaching how to respond to harsh adults; hence, these directives would apply even more to children (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 78, Hadith 60).

The Prophet treated children with mercy, gentleness, care, and playfulness, as can be seen in the many prophetic narrations that offer disciplinary and educational techniques enveloped in gentleness. He embodied mercy and wisdom when pointing out mistakes and teaching children and adults how to behave. For example, a narration from 'Umar bin Abī Salama who said: "I was a boy under the care of Allah's Messenger, and my hand used to go around the dish while I was eating. So Allah's Messenger said to me, 'O boy! Mention the Name of Allah and eat with your right hand, and eat of the dish what is nearer to you.' Since then, I have applied those instructions when eating" (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 70, Hadith 4). Instead of reprimanding him, the Prophet offered directives about the etiquette of eating, and his gentle approach enabled the boy to observe them for the rest of his life.

In another instance, the Prophet sought to educate a child about respecting elders by using courteousness and benevolence – he sought a boy's permission when he did not need to ('Ulwan, 1992). Sahl bin Sa'd reported that: "A drink was brought to the Messenger of Allah and he drank some of it. On his right was a boy, and on his left were older people. He asked the boy, 'Would you permit me to give the rest of this drink to those on my left?' The boy said, 'O Messenger of Allah, I would certainly not give preference to anyone in anything that might come to me from you.' So, he handed over the rest of the drink to him." (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 42, Hadith 14).

While the prophetic example reveals the effectiveness of gentleness and compassion when educating and disciplining children, it also shows that different techniques work for different individuals. Parents must be aware of their children's nature and discover which forms of discipline do and do not work so they can keep their child's best interest in mind. As each child differs in temperament, intelligence, and maturity, parents must be aware of the child's disposition when determining the most suitable punishment. A stern glance or tone may be enough for some, whereas others may need to be reprimanded and yet others may only learn through spanking ('Ulwan, 1992).

Islamic texts present a wide range of disciplinary approaches other than spanking, among them preaching, reminding, frowning, abstinence, reprimanding, warning, withholding privileges, and showing a spanking tool. Such variety addresses the needs of human beings, no two of whom are exactly the same. At the heart of this is the Islamic worldview's contention that human beings are

driven by two major instincts: hope and fear. Islamic texts show a balanced approach in utilizing both drives to encourage proper conduct (Qutb, 2004; Shuwaidah & Hirbid, 2005).

Although the Prophet never struck anyone, he instructed parents to "command your children to perform *ṣalāt* (prayer) when they are seven years old, and spank them for (not offering) it when they are ten, and let boys and girls sleep in separate beds" (*Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, Book 2, Hadith 105). This tradition highlights the significance of teaching children to fulfill their religious obligations and indicates that some may need different disciplinary measures to become upright. However, this permissibility to spank is accompanied by several restrictions and should be used only if all else fails, as will be discussed in detail later.

Parenting is a responsibility, and parents must fulfill their children's rights by providing them with everything that ensures their physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. Another fundamental principle that relates to parenting is not harming children. As the legal maxim "there should be no harm done nor reciprocating harm" is an essential Islamic concept, any form of abuse or neglect is unacceptable because parents and educators are forbidden to harm children. The Prophet even prohibited supplicating against children or cursing them (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 55, Hadith 94). Accordingly, discipline should be carried out only if it will result in a positive outcome, as opposed to satisfying the parents' anger or frustration. Thus, extreme CP is forbidden, whereas spanking is considered permissible if it meets specific requirements. For this reason, parents and educators may be under the impression that beating children is permissible in general and therefore engage in abusive behavior. Given this fact, they must understand the Islamic perspective in this regard.

Corporal Punishment in Islam

Parents and educators may turn to CP to turn their children and students toward good character and manners, especially when children seem to be going astray or falling into error. Parents may do so while being unaware of Islam's standpoint on the issue. Extreme forms of CP that cause physical and psychological harm are forbidden, as Islam holds human dignity in great esteem and forbids inflicting harm. Children are a trust, and abusing them breaches that trust. Thus, those who betray it will be held accountable.

Given that gentleness is the standard governing rule in all educational settings, physical punishment should not be the usual disciplinary approach (Al-'Abdari, n.d.). The Prophet, may peace and blessings be upon him, once saw his wife 'Ā'isha hitting a camel hard because it was somewhat intractable and difficult to control. He commanded her to be gentle and gracious, saying, "gentleness is not found in anything but that it beautifies it, and it is not removed

from anything but that it disgraces it" (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 45, Hadith 100). Interestingly, this was said in the context of disciplining an animal, let alone a human being. The Prophet describes Allah, the most exalted, as "Allah is Gentle, and He loves gentleness in every matter." Therefore, Ibn Saḥnūn, Ibn Miskawayh, and other famous Muslim scholars who wrote on parenting and education encouraged praise and gentle guidance over spanking or harsh discipline (Ibn Yahy, 2012; Al-Nasir, 1990).

However, as a gentler approach may not always work, classical jurists reached widespread agreement that mild forms of physical punishment are permissible as a means of discipline (*ta'dīb*) (Al-Shirbini, 1994). Nonetheless, they stipulated many prerequisites and conditions concerning the child, the punishment method, and the person inflicting it. They based their views on a few hadith narrations that seem to permit using physical punishment when necessary, such as the prophetic tradition mentioned above that instructs parents to spank their children for not offering the prayer when they are ten years old. Scholars also stipulate that physical punishment should only be used as a last resort, like resorting to an intense medication regimen when an illness is resistant to treatment.

Although Islamic jurisprudence considers physical punishment an acceptable form of discipline, the famous hadith scholar Al-'Asqalanī (d. 1449 CE) stated that a teacher has to consider what is in the child's best interest and most suitable for the infraction. Thus, the teacher should not resort to harsh discipline when a milder form is sufficient (as cited in Al-'Abdari, n.d.). Other scholars, such as Ibn Al-Ḥājj (d. 1336 CE) and Al-'Izz ibn 'Abd al-Salām (d. 1262 CE), agreed and argued that beating can be used only in a state of dire necessity (Al-'Abdari, n.d.; MERFK, 2006). They also supported a graded approach to discipline, indicating that what might work for one child may not work for another. While some children only respond to physical punishment, a frown or verbal scolding may be sufficient for others (Al-'Abdari, n.d.). Moreover, to further reduce the need for spanking, scholars encouraged parents to consider warning their children about a possible spanking instead of actually spanking them (Ibn Yahy, 2012).

Scholars outlined certain conditions that must be met before resorting to spanking. Firstly, the parent or educator should use it only as a last resort; that it should not be employed during a state of anger to prevent any harm; and the head, face, chest, stomach, and other sensitive body parts should not be struck ('Ulwan, 1992). Scholars specified that only a *ghayr mubarriḥ* type of beating is acceptable. This term, which is frequently used in Islamic scholarly texts, refers to the acceptable forms of physical punishment administered at home, a beating that is not disgraceful, violent, excruciating, intense, outrageous, indecent, severe,

tormenting, or agonizing. In other words, only a relatively light, symbolic beating is permissible.

Additionally, some scholars were even more restrictive in this regard. For instance, some allowed using a "whip" but only if it were not as strong as the ones used for corporal punishment in criminal cases (Al-'Abdari, n.d.). Certain scholars also specified the number of lashes allowed (three) and concluded that the parent or teacher might be liable if they exceed that limit and thereby harm the child. In all of their rulings, however, they urged teachers and parents not to exceed the limits, to avoid physical punishment as much as possible, and to steer clear of harsh tools (invented later on) such as dry sticks and spiky tree branches (Al-'Abdari, n.d.). Others mentioned that only the parent or educator, as opposed to another child or student, should beat the child. The logic behind this was to prevent jealousy and hatred from developing between them ('Ulwan, 1992).

After reflecting on such physical punishments' negative moral and psychological consequences, many scholars forbade or discouraged them and only allowed spanking after all other forms of punishment had failed. The classical scholar Ibn Khaldūn (2015) details how severity harms students, especially young children:

> Students … who are brought up with injustice and (tyrannical) force are overcome by it. It makes them feel oppressed and causes them to lose their energy. It makes them lazy and induces them to lie and be insincere. That is, their outward behavior differs from what they are thinking because they are afraid that they will have to suffer tyrannical treatment (if they tell the truth). Thus, they are taught deceit and trickery. This becomes their custom and character. They lose the quality that goes with social and political organization and makes people human … and they become dependent on others. Indeed, their souls become too indolent to (attempt to) acquire the virtues and good character qualities. Thus, they fall short of their potentialities and do not reach the limit of their humanity. As a result, they revert to the stage of 'the lowest of the low'. (p.618)

In this way, he describes that harshness results in the opposite of the original desired outcome, namely, that the children develop a noble character and are righteous (Ibn Khaldun, 2015).

Ibn Khaldūn adopts Muhammad ibn Zayd's opinion: If children must be spanked, the educator should strike them no more than three times. Likewise, he mentions that Caliph Al-Rashid suggested one of the best teaching methods, as well as many tips to his son's teacher Khalaf ibn Ahmar:

> Let no hour pass in which you do not seize the opportunity to teach him something useful. But do so without vexing him, which would kill his mind. Do not always be too lenient with him, or he will get to like leisure and become used to it. As much as possible, correct him kindly and gently.

If he does not want it that way, you must then use severity and harshness. (Ibn Khaldun, 2015, p.620)

This disciplinary approach corresponds with the prophetic example of showing mercy and gentleness toward children.

When Muslim scholars discussed disciplinary beating and spanking, they justified the use of physical punishment after requiring an assessment of what is in the child's best interest in terms of what best suits his/her character, would be an effective intervention, and would achieve the most benefit and do the least harm. Al-ʻAsqalanī indicated that spanking's permissibility is linked to its potential effectiveness. Deeming it ineffective or harmful, therefore, cancels its permissibility (cited in Al-ʻAbdari, n.d.). Such discussions portray beating as a process and decision reached when one is calm and reasonable, as opposed to being a reaction to rage and infuriation. The Hadith literature warns against anger and praises self-restraint during times of rage (*Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, Book 78, Hadith 143; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 45, Hadith 140; *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 30, Hadith 21; *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, Book 12, Hadith 8). Therefore, these scholars emphasized that enraged or angry parents or teachers should discipline a child only after they cool down; otherwise, they risk over-disciplining the child. Scholars highlighted that disciplining a child at such emotional times actually is done to meet the parents' or teachers' needs, rather than attaining the child's best interest, and can be more retaliatory and revengeful than disciplinary in nature (Al-ʻAbdari, n.d.; Al-Qabisi & Khalid, 1986).

Clearly, other means of discipline should take precedence over punishment to ensure that a child becomes a righteous individual. Parents and educators must also keep in mind that because children differ in their natures, the same type of discipline may not work for all of them, just as the same medication does not work for all patients. Their job is to determine why the child made that particular mistake by taking into account his/her age, culture, environment, and other relevant factors and correct the child by applying the most appropriate tool (ʻUlwan, 1992).

Overall, Muslim scholars encouraged a balanced approach, one that utilizes positive reinforcement to attain the desired behavior instead of focusing too much on punishing the undesired behavior. It was reported that the famous ascetic Ibrāhīm ibn Adham (d. 782 CE) was encouraged to learn and seek the knowledge of hadith when his father told him, "Oh my son! Seek the knowledge of hadith! For each hadith you learn and memorize, I will give you a dirham" (Al-Baghdadi, n.d., p.66). Scholars encouraged offering both physical (e.g., monetary prizes) as well as non-physical (e.g., praise and showing love) rewards (Al-Qabisi & Khalid, 1986). Additionally, Ibn Al-Ḥājj stated that training and disciplining children properly prevents parents from resorting to physical punishment (Al-ʻAbdari, n.d.).

‘Abd al-Karim Bakkar, a contemporary Muslim parenting expert, agreed with this view and called for eradicating the culture of spanking and beating as a disciplinary approach. He actually proposed that the need for them could be used as a way of measuring the success of the parents and educators’ parenting skills. If they are needed, the parenting method should be revisited and the people using it retrained (Bakkar, 2009).

As shown above, corporal punishment is only permitted as a last resort and must not physically or psychologically harm the child. If its sole purpose, namely, to train the child to be upright and have good manners, can be achieved through alternative methods, then the latter methods are preferable. If beating does not rectify the child’s behavior, then it is no longer permissible.

Ethical and Moral Dilemmas Surrounding Mandated Reporting

Mandated reporters face ethical dilemmas that affect whether or not they report cases of child abuse. Legal and religious factors may underpin these dilemmas, as may feelings of guilt, religious and cultural differences, a lack of sufficient training, and the inability to distinguish discipline from abuse (Fields & Nunnelley, 1999; Bryant & Milsom, 2005). Mandated reporters, understanding that their reports have consequences, worry if they will break up the family, if the parents will see the child again, if they will have to go to court, or if they will lose their job (Fields & Nunnelley, 1999). They not only grapple with the fear of fines, lawsuits, imprisonment, or losing their jobs if they do not report, but also with the guilt of what may happen to the child and the family if they do. Additionally, there is a possibility that reporting will cause more psychological trauma, for the ensuing process is frequently more traumatic than the abuse itself (Remley & Fry, 1993, p.253). All these feelings and thoughts cause significant anxiety and stress, as mandated reporters struggle ethically with balancing between doing the right thing and fulfilling their legal duty to report.

Muslim mandated reporters have to contend with the added dimension of the Islamic perspective in their dilemmas of whether or not to report. Harming a child is not Islamically acceptable. Additionally, as Muslims are commanded to enjoin good and forbid evil, mandated reporters must try to ensure that the abuse ends by advising the parents that beating is unacceptable or by reporting the abuse to the authorities. In the latter instance, however, the consequences of doing so should be weighed in light of Islamic teachings. Placing the child in a non-Muslim home could harm his/her faith. Thus, the dilemma can be analyzed based on the *maqāṣid al-Sharīʿa* (higher objectives of the sharia), namely, preserving a person’s faith, life, intellect, lineage, and wealth, all of which are essentially interconnected and depend upon each other. The majority of jurists prioritize the preservation of faith, for life’s ultimate purpose is to worship God and the last three are connected to preserving life (Al-Yubi, 1997; Atiyya, 2003).

In cases of abuse, a child's life, intellect, and lineage can be at stake. The sharia mandates that human beings be protected from physical and emotional harm, be provided with what is necessary for survival, that their limbs be protected from losing their function, and that harm be prevented before it befalls a person (Ibn Zughayba, 1996, p.177-79). As such, physical abuse clearly contradicts the sharia's objective of safeguarding life.

Physical abuse also causes psychological trauma, which contradicts the sharia's mandate to preserve the intellect by prohibiting all that distorts it, whether by material means (e.g., intoxicants) and/or anything else that causes psychological harm.

Reporting cases of abuse could break up the family and result in the loss of lineage. As preserving one's lineage is one of the sharia's main objectives, parents are duty-bound and responsible for raising upright individuals. Without that parental guidance, children may go astray and lose their faith. If they are permanently removed from their biological parents and adopted by someone else, they may also lose their lineage.

Preserving these interests and weighing the outcomes of reporting and not reporting abuse further adds to a reporter's dilemma, for doing so puts the essentials of faith, life, intellect, and lineage at risk. Additionally, as a Muslim, one must also enjoin good and forbid evil. Clearly, abuse is an evil that must be stopped. However, determining how to forbid evil in these circumstances, whether reporting to the authorities or advising the parents, is confusing and adds to the mandated reporter's stress.

Applications, Synthesis, and Recommendations

Case Vignette #1[1]

Amira, a fourteen-year-old Muslim girl of South Asian descent living with her parents and younger siblings, was seen by a Caucasian therapist for depression. Her father had a history of physically, emotionally, and financially abusing his wife and children. Repeated CPS reports were made against him and were consistently closed on the premise that his abuse was permissible within his religious beliefs. When Amira turned seventeen, she was in her room with a respite worker assigned through a case management agency. Her father entered her room and, angered by her listening to music, pulled her by the hair and pushed her. Amira fell, hit her head on the bedpost, and sustained a cut on her forehead that required stitches. Another CPS report was filed. But despite her visible

[1] N.B. Names and identifying information have been changed for the case vignettes.

injury, the investigation concluded that the allegation of abuse was unfounded on religious and cultural grounds due to her father allegedly responding within the laws of his religion. Following this case, Amira became more defiant of her father: She would lie about her academic responsibilities and started dating in secret. Although she was doing well in school and aspired to go to college, she remained fearful that her father would take her to Bangladesh to get married. Thus, she sought out a partner to escape from her father. Due to the religious and cultural disconnect between Amira's family and the therapist, she was enrolled in a case management program and connected with a Muslim caseworker who also engaged in family work. The caseworker attempted to teach both parents parenting skills; however, the father stated repeatedly that he was a teacher of the Quran in his country of origin, thereby shutting down any communication around healthy parenting techniques.

Case Vignette #2

Fatima is a licensed school counselor who discovers that Sayed, an eight-year-old Muslim child, is being physically beaten at home. Fatima is Muslim and active in the Muslim community, where she frequently encounters Sayed's parents. Being a refugee from an Arab country, Sayed has been working with Fatima at school. One day she notices that he is not himself. Fatima is able to confirm, with hesitation from Sayed, that he is often beaten at home and that lately the beatings have become more violent and intense. She fears for his safety and physical well-being, but also fears the outcome of reporting. Fatima knows that, culturally, the definitions of discipline and punishment vary. However, she is concerned that reporting would cause the child to be placed in foster care, that his siblings will be removed, placed in different, almost certainly non-Muslim, homes, and raised as non-Muslims. Additionally, how will she face his parents at the mosque when they discover that she was the one who reported them? If she does not report, she might face legal consequences. Fatima finds herself in a very difficult situation with complex legal, ethical, and religious outcomes regardless of what decision she makes (Hazratji, 2021).

Discussion

These two cases underline some of the complexities of reporting and handling child abuse and corporal punishment cases, particularly as they interact with cultural and religious factors. They also highlight some of the ethical dilemmas and challenges faced by clinicians and CPS workers.

Corporal punishment has many roots and implications. Severe CP stands out as a matter of grave concern due to its potential harmful emotional and physical consequences. Nevertheless, it continues to be justified via religious interpretations, cultural factors, and legal allowances. Many parents consider CP a

noble practice that yields upright religious children (such as in Amira's case). Otherwise, parents may perceive themselves as *lousy* and neglecting their parental duties (Ibn al-Qayyim, 1971). In addition to the contributing religious and cultural factors, CP may also stem from chaotic lifestyles that are overburdened by poverty, mental illness, or misinformation. It may also be inflicted by otherwise loving, caring, and supportive parents who may occasionally cross the line (Fontes, 2005).

This complexity calls for a case-by-case assessment of CP to avoid generalizations and stereotyping of individual families who belong to those religious and cultural minority groups, as those belonging to a particular group may vary widely in their acceptance of CP practices (Fontes, 2005). The nature and extent of CP must be delineated before suspecting a case of abuse. Baumrind et al. (2002) suggest that the fact that some parents may use severe and excessive CP should not lead to a ban on the use of mild to moderate effective CP. Instead, they suggest that such parents be counseled to avoid CP altogether. In other words, it should be eliminated in families with a high risk of physical abuse, such as in the cases of Amira and Sayed. This careful case-by-case examination attempts to evaluate families' perspectives and practices based on the degree of *ḍarar* (harm) and *ḍarūra* (necessity). CP should be assessed within the family's context and in light of its response to guidance and support, as well as other risk factors that exist within the family.

That being said, clinicians should be aware of what Fontes (2005) called "false negatives," that is, failing to report child abuse when it exists. This might be due to prioritizing religious and cultural values over the child's psychological and physical needs, as in the case of Amira. Clinicians should realize that although there might be more than one way to raise and discipline children, not every cultural practice is harmless. Moreover, religion might sometimes be used in the guise of culture, as opposed to what it really is: a personal interpretation or replication of a communal interpretation of the religion that holds no evidence or truth. To address this, clinicians may need to consult with the appropriate religious clergy or community leaders to better understand the disciplinary practices allowed by Islamic law. Collaborative sessions may also be considered, as well as consulting with supervisors in the case of ambiguity. The overall aim is for clinicians to balance between overreacting and underreacting to cultural and religious factors (Fontes, 2005).

Attempting to address this intricate touchy area, UNICEF collaborated with leading Sunni and Shiʿi authorities to release guidance statements regarding children's rights, including the right for protection against CP. In a book published jointly by UNICEF and Al-Azhar University, a leading Sunni authority, entitled *Children in Islam: Their Care, Upbringing and Protection* (1985), it is stated,

> Disciplining the child should take place without the use of violence or abusive language, however, children should be brought up with pride and self-confidence… Given that it is not permissible to incur harm, no parent (or teacher or employer) has the right to smack a child; this would inevitably inflict psychological as well as physical damage. Both psychological and physical damages have been banned by the Islamic *Sharīʻa*... All forms of corporal punishment should be avoided as a means of disciplining children. The child's parents, teachers or employers should never resort to it. (Al-Azhar University, 2005, p.55-57)

A similar book, entitled *Disciplining Children With Kindness: A Shiite Shariʻa Perspective*, was the product of a collaboration between UNICEF and Iranian religious authorities. These efforts underline the importance of delineating what is truly cultural or religious and what one would seek to justify either by culture or religion. Additionally, while CP might be more common or culturally acceptable in a given Muslim family's country of origin, the family is expected to abide by the laws of the land in which they live when those laws do not contradict Islamic teachings. One can argue that the laws related to protecting children do not contradict Islamic law (Al-Qudah, 2009; Adam, 2004). In other words, families' cultural beliefs regarding CP should neither be eliminated nor overestimated, for their cultural values can be supported while simultaneously challenging harsh disciplinary practices (Fontes, 2005).

Clinicians confronted with CP cases clearly play a multidimensional role. Being the first ones to encounter the parents, they have to approach CP in a way that fosters trust with the family, creates a supportive atmosphere, respects cultural values, opens doors for education, and minimizes harm to children. Conversations with parents about CP can come across as offensive, alienating, and threatening, particularly when addressing minority families who may already view child protective services in a negative light (Fontes, 2005). Such a discussion is made even more complex because the US legal system and the Islamic tradition, to a certain extent, consider using CP or physical forms of discipline legally acceptable, respectively. Thus, clinicians should attempt to balance the right to discipline and the right to religious freedom with the duty to protect and report. This balance seems to be missing in Amira's case and is at the heart of Fatima's dilemma.

One way of achieving this balance is to emphasize psychoeducation. Clinicians should take advantage of the educational opportunities that arise in encounters where CP is noted. Education may revolve around alternative disciplining methods, potential harms, and the potential of slipping into a CP so severe that it constitutes reportable physical child abuse. Clinicians may use a "motivational interviewing" style to instill doubts regarding its effectiveness and create some cognitive dissonance and discrepancy with the parents' parenting

values. All of this should be done while being vigilant and prepared to report and intervene in cases of well-meaning but abusive CP.

The above intricacies are difficult to navigate and place clinicians in ethical conundrums. Clinicians are expected to report CP cases that meet the definition of child abuse in the state in which they practice, even if it is done only once by well-meaning, caring parents. Although the CPS investigation's outcome in a case of a single incident of severe abusive CP may significantly differ from a case of repeated physical abuse, the process of reporting and investigating can be traumatic for parents. Therefore, clinicians should carefully decide whether or not to make the family aware of the report. Either way, they must make families aware of their professional duties and boundaries. They may also offer additional education on the process and procedures of CPS investigations if they were to inform the parents about the report. Clinicians should avoid losing the family's trust as much as possible, make them realize that their duty, both before and after reporting, is the child's well-being, and should demonstrate this by acts of advocacy and support (Fontes, 2005). Even when CPS dismisses a case, the clinician has a moral duty to protect the child and support the parents.

When working with observant Muslim clients, clinicians must address the parents' religious concerns, such as their children being placed in non-Muslim foster homes. Although Islamic law supports removing custody from a parent who inflicts physical and psychological harm on the child, one must also realize that protecting the child's faith is critical (Khurshid, 2012). If Muslim foster homes do exist, the dilemmas of many clinicians like Fatima (case vignette #2) would be significantly minimized. CPS workers should do their best to address the families' religious needs and concerns while protecting their children.

Clinicians and parents must also understand Islam's nuanced position on CP. As highlighted earlier, although one hadith narration endorses CP in the context of teaching prayers, the same narration also significantly restricts its use. First, hadith commentators have defined CP in markedly different terms from any potential abusive practices. Second, the Hadith literature underscores that beating should be preceded by at least three years of teaching, motivation, and training. This displays the utility of other disciplinary measures and maintains CP only as a last resort. Third, the Hadith literature indicates that children below the age of ten should not be physically disciplined. Contrast this with the UNICEF report's finding that the ages most likely to experience CP are 5-9 (UNICEF 2010). More importantly, despite this theoretical allowance of CP, Prophet Muhammad never spanked any of his household's members. In fact, he warned a woman against marrying a man who was known for beating women, which is reminiscent of Amira's father (case vignette #1) (*Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Book 18, Hadith 45). Thus, practically speaking, Islam allows CP but restricts it so much that its utility is almost nonexistent.

This makes a strong case for advocating that Muslim children be protected from all forms of CP, even if that means reporting such cases to CPS. "Mandated reporting" is a contemporary construct and thus absent from classical Islamic literature. However, it is a form of proactive advocacy reminiscent of *al-amr bi-l-ma'rūf wa nahy 'an al-munkar* (commanding good and forbidding evil), a central practice in Islam and one for which every Muslim shares some degree of responsibility in implementing. Reporting severe cases of CP is a verbal form of *nahy 'an al-munkar*, which intends to minimize the *munkar* (evil) or harm of severe CP and child abuse.

Understanding the Islamic worldview on parenting and discipline is important because, as the UNICEF report indicated, the use of CP is influenced by the parents' beliefs. Households that considered physical violence unnecessary were less likely to resort to it, and vice versa. However, the majority of caregivers utilize CP despite their belief that it is unnecessary, a reality that only highlights the need for a more comprehensive plan for handling and addressing CP. A comprehensive plan should include national strategies to address violence against children, parenting programs to promote non-violent disciplinary practices, training clinicians working with children and families how to handle violence, and public awareness campaigns. Parenting interventions should not only seek to substitute one form of punishment with another, but also to broadly promote the parent-child relationship, reduce stressors, diminish undesired behaviors, and reinforce positive ones (UNICEF, 2010).

Culturally sensitive parenting programs are critical to raising the Muslim community's awareness of this issue. There are some successful precedents in Muslim-majority countries. For example, the *Better Parenting Programme*, implemented nationwide in Jordan, was attended by more than 130,000 parents and caregivers who reported a lower use of negative disciplinary practices. In Yemen, a national parenting and disciplining techniques manual was developed and distributed by the Ministry of Education (UNICEF, 2010). Independent Muslim authors also attempted to make positive contributions to the literature, such as *Positive Parenting in the Muslim Home* (Alshugairi et al., 2017). More efforts by Muslim governments and community leaders in diaspora communities are needed to facilitate training programs for parents and parents-to-be. The role of imams is also critical in disseminating this knowledge and raising public awareness via the Friday sermons and weekly classes.

Conclusion

Despite the wide prevalence of harsh disciplinary practices in the Muslim world, there are more convergences than divergences between the Islamic tradition and the contemporary discourse on children's right to protection against violence. Leading Muslim authorities have issued reports, books, and fatwas advocating the

protection of children against violence. Such Islamic teachings must be translated and disseminated as widely as possible through parenting training programs, public media, and sermons.

Clinicians working with Muslim families may face challenges in interpreting, addressing, and reporting violent disciplinary practices due to cultural, ethnic, religious, and professional factors. They should attempt to strike a balance between overreacting and underreacting to cultural and religious factors. CPS agencies should address the families' spiritual and religious needs when formulating appropriate interventions in cases of confirmed abuse. Clinicians continue to face ethical dilemmas with regard to reporting child abuse, particularly corporal punishment. Training, supervision, consultation, and collaboration with clergy are all potential resources to navigate these dilemmas.

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The Role of Muslim American Nonprofits in Combating Domestic Violence in the Community: An Exploratory Overview

Shariq Siddiqui[1] and Zeeshan Noor[2]

Abstract

Domestic violence, misogyny, and patriarchy have long been a challenge for society. In fact, one of the first realities confronting Prophet Muhammad was the inequity and inequality of women, orphans, and the vulnerable. This resulted in the forbidding of killing female babies and giving women the rights to decide who to marry, request a divorce, and own property – instead of being property – and much more. Many of the Prophet's words and actions (the Hadith and Sunnah) are known to us today because of the memories shared by his wife Aisha. The fact that she became such an important keeper of this tradition and that her memories required no corroborating witness suggest the important role she played in early Islamic society. The Prophet's first supporter and convert was his first wife Khadijah. One of the wealthiest entrepreneurs of her time, she provided the financial independence for the development of the Islamic faith. Both of them play critical roles in Islam's establishment and eventual dissemination. They are beloved by Muslims, but the fact that they are women *and* leaders has not been institutionalized.

Despite these revolutionary reforms, humanity's failure to continue them has led societies, families, and social structures to find ways to control women and further strengthen existing patriarchal societies. One component of this social control is domestic and sexual violence within existing familial structures.

This article seeks to place the efforts of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA) to fight domestic violence in the Muslim American community from 1997 through 2005. In addition to examining the society's annual reports

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and *Islamic Horizons* magazine, it draws on the coauthors'[3] embedded experience. It first examines the literature associated with religiosity, Islamic perspectives on domestic violence, Muslim Americans, and Muslim Americans and domestic violence. The article then undertakes a case study of ISNA from 1997 to 2004 and concludes with recommendations for future research.

Keywords: Muslim American nonprofits, combating domestic violence, DV efforts, ISNA

Literature Review

Religiosity in the United States

Despite declining participation and affiliation driven by modernity, religion has remained an important factor in the United States. Successive studies and contemporary findings suggest a phenomenal degenerative trend in religious affiliations, as well as a growing tendency to identify as "atheist," "agnostic," or "unaffiliated" (Twenge et al., 2016; Thomas, 2019). Instead of self-identifying as belonging to a certain religion, a vast majority of people prefer to establish their identity as being "spiritual" (Lipka & Gecewicz, 2018), a trend more in vogue among millennials and middle-aged cohorts (Percy, 2019). Having said this, religion nevertheless remains an important factor, for the GivingUSA report (2020) indicates that around one-third of all charitable giving goes to religion-related causes. Additionally, these contributions have been growing since 2015 (Giving USA, 2020).

Religiosity's role in the US came to the fore in the mid-1990s as the Clinton administration attempted to restructure the social welfare system. The consequent Welfare Reforms Bill of 1996 provisioned for a Charitable Choice, which made it easier for churches and other religiously oriented service organizations to receive government funds. In a similar pattern, on January 29, 2002, President George W. Bush signed an executive order creating the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives to fulfill one of his campaign promises. This was a milestone achievement toward systematizing the above-mentioned notion incubated during the Clinton administration, namely, to shift some social programs from government control to religious organizations (Wuthnow, 2009).

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An Islamic Perspective on Domestic Violence

For Muslims, Islam is God's final message to humanity. It was revealed during the despotic and oppressive social and political reality of seventh-century Arabia, when cruelty, offense, and warmongering were the order of the day. The region's imperial rivalries created instability that, in turn, shaped Arabia's social and political life. As inequality and injustice were everywhere, there was no concept of rights for the weak and downtrodden, orphans and widows, and slaves and servants. Islam brought salvation for these impoverished individuals, established a system of justice and amnesty in that age of darkness, and denounced all oppressive conduct. There is a robust scholarly debate over whether the equality of all human beings, irrespective of race, class, gender, wealth, or worth, is one of the Quran's basic injunctions. Wadud (2016) and Barlas (2016) agree with this statement, whereas Ayesha Hidayatullah (2016) and Kecia Ali (2016) have some doubts about these claims. Hidayatullah and Ali also have some doubts about the ability of scholars to interpret away some key verses and differences in the notion of Quranic equality and modern-day notions. However, these scholars agree that Islam improved the status of women in society, which was a true revolution amid that era's prevailing cultural norms. In the pre-Islamic Arab world women were not treated as human beings, and men who felt disgraced by the birth of a daughter would bury her alive. Within this environment, Islam made society recognize women as human beings and gave them a comprehensive set of rights (Alwani, 2017).

The Quran forbade the terrible tradition of female infanticide, abolished the custom of considering women the property of men, and refuted the practice that let a deceased man's brother or adult son inherit his wife and take her for himself without her consent (Ali, 2000). The Quran declared that men and women are equal before God, thereby denouncing these established norms and customs. Islam proclaimed that the standard for attaining recognition and distinction in God's eyes is *taqwa* (piety), as opposed to gender, ethnicity, race, or socioeconomic class:

> O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise [each other]). Verily the most honored of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things). (49:13)

Additionally, the Quran views men and women as partners of each other. According to 9:71, both sexes are responsible for enjoining what is right and preventing what is sinful. Men have no superior moral authority over women in any manner. In fact, both sexes are equally obliged to maintain each other on the righteous path and deter each other from aberration (Wadud, 1999; Alwani, 2013).

Amid the prevalent culture of bullying women in an unbridled manner, the Quran discouraged the blatant practice of domestic violence through structured edicts designed to resolve marital disputes resulting from a husband's apprehensions about his wife's lustful conduct. Such verses should be applied with a careful interpretation and proper understanding of Islamic jurisprudence. For example, applying 4:34 is strictly confined to a situation in which the wife is assumed to be guilty of *nushūz* (lewd conduct). Secondly, the Quran ordains certain procedures that a husband must comply with if he is confronted with such a situation. First, he must advise her. If that does not work, then he should stop sleeping with her, which is kind of a warning to make her realize the implications of not changing her conduct (Alwani, 2013). Some Muslims argue that husbands have the right to discipline their wives through physical abuse. However, Islam refutes this supposed "right" to the extent of allowing the abused wife to claim recompense under *ta'zīr* (optional physical punishment) (Ibrahim, 2017).

The Contribution of Muslim Americans in the Nonprofit Sector

A Bird's Eye View of the Muslim American Nonprofit Sector

One of the vital signs of connection among Muslims is their empathy toward other Muslims. Contrary to some definitions of philanthropy, which see such an activity as a wholly voluntary act, Muslims consider it a key aspect of their duty toward God and as a right owed to God. Muslims consider donating money to nonprofit institutions as one way of promoting their identity. Following their religious injunctions, which teach and promote a sense of collectivism, Muslims have established religious institutions, mosques, schools, advocacy organizations that argue for civil rights, and relief organizations to donate to their co-religionists living in developing countries.

The Muslim American nonprofit sector is predominantly comprised of small-sized nonprofit organizations (Siddiqui, 2010), perhaps because this country's very diverse Muslim diaspora lacks the integration required to constitute larger nonprofit organizations. As suggested by Khader and Siddiqui (2018), the Muslim Americans' lack of contributions to religious causes is, in contrast to other religious communities, due to their lower numbers and comparative dearth of wealth.

The growth of Muslim nonprofit organizations has been directly proportional to the growing American Muslim population. The community has built approximately 3,000 mosques (Bagby, 2020), and some scholars estimate the number of Islamic schools to be 235 and growing (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017). In 2020 there were 3,020 Muslim nonprofits in the country under the "Islamic" nonprofits NTEE category (X40) registered with the Internal Revenue Service, although this number is likely much higher (www.guidestar.org).

As stated above, IRS data alone does not represent the exact number of Muslim American nonprofits. Although larger Muslim philanthropic nonprofits such as the Council of American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), and Islamic Relief USA are included within these figures, some smaller organizations are either not yet registered or are currently going through the process. Numerous new Muslim nonprofits, apart from mosques and schools, have appeared in recent years. The majority of Muslim nonprofits are small, for the establishment of large ones has not yet occurred (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017).

In the aftermath of 9/11, the Muslim nonprofit sector has been subjected to increased scrutiny (Bail, 2015) because the general public and government officials perceive the community's philanthropic organizations with greater skepticism (Thaut, 2009; Khan, 2015; Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2017; Noor et al., 2021). Three renowned ones were raided and forcefully shut down by various law enforcement agencies in 2001. Five more were raided later on by the newly established homeland security apparatus; there were no subsequent prosecutions (Watanabe, 2004; MacFarquhar, 2006; Watanabe & Esquivel, 2009; Turner, 2009, 2011). Such episodes undoubtedly caused mistrust between the government and Muslim American nonprofits (Caple, 2010-2011). Those Muslims involved in the nonprofit sector are apprehensive that the Patriot Act and similar anti-terrorism laws exist to target them (MacFarquhar, 2006; Watanabe & Esquivel, 2009; Bloodgood & Tremblay-Boire, 2011; Siddiqui, 2013).

This environment of mistrust worsened during Donald Trump's presidency, as Islamophobia was a prominent theme of his election strategy (Lajevardi, 2020) and post-election executive orders. For example, numerous Islamic nonprofits cited Trump's January 2017 signing of an executive order that banned travel from six Muslim-majority countries as an example of his Islamophobic rhetoric. CAIR asked him to abstain from such rhetoric and actions, stating, "Unfortunately, it is President Trump's policies, appointments, and statements that have contributed to the mainstreaming of Islamophobia and anti-immigrant rhetoric. It is time for him to clearly state that he is the president of all Americans, including American Muslims, and that he rejects Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and all other forms of bigotry" (CAIR, 2017). Muslim-American domestic violence organizations operate within this framework. They have to contend with their internal challenges of fighting against domestic violence while externally defending Muslims from charges of faith-based misogyny. Their work is often under-funded, in an already anemic nonprofit sector, for fear of furthering Islamophobic tropes. Muslim-American organizations that fight domestic violence have to navigate both internal and external legitimacy using very limited resources.

Muslim Americans and Domestic Violence

Domestic violence exists among all cultural and religious groups (Krantz & Garcia Moreno, 2005). In today's world, there is a renewed focus on violence and its various modalities: social, political, structural, interpersonal, and familial. However, some families experience the harshest violence. Surveys reveal that domestic violence occurs every 6 to 20 seconds in the US, UK, and other countries, including Muslim-majority ones (Alwani, 2017). Unfortunately, this is one of the most complex enigmas facing humanity as a whole. According to some estimates, 25% of all homicides in the United States are committed by a family member; 50% of them are husband-wife killings (Cantalano et al,, 2009).

Domestic violence includes many types of abuse: verbal, emotional, sexual, physical, financial, and spiritual. One aspect of Islamophobia is the belief that domestic violence is *more* prevalent in Muslim communities than in others, thereby implying that it is condoned by Islamic texts and/or Muslim social-cultural practices. This view has increased in the post-9/11 world, along with negative stereotypes suggesting that Islam actively promotes domestic violence and the abusive treatment of women. In reality, however, Islam endorses gender equality and denounces all violence against women (Al-Hibri, 2000; Hassan, 1996). Viewed another way, just because a small proportion of followers of a specific religion/faith do something wrong does not mean that the faith tradition condones it. Domestic violence, a form patriarchal violence, is therefore part of a gendered social structure and has little to do with Islam or any other religion.

A Brief Assessment of Domestic Violence in Muslim-Mainstream Countries

That said, the existence of domestic violence in Muslim-majority countries cannot be denied. Certain countries can have culturally peculiar manifestations of domestic violence (Ammar, 2006; Haj-Yahia, 1998). For example, domestic violence within the Middle East's cultural context is largely perceived to be a personal or family issue, as opposed to a serious public health threat or a politico-legal issue (Kulwicki & Miller, 1999). A study of 121 Afghan men and women revealed that 30% felt progressively disturbed about family violence (Abirafeh, 2007). Another survey of 2,677 Bangladeshi women aged between 13 and 40 showed that 75.6% of them had experienced violence at the hands of their husbands (Silverman et al., 2007). Vizcarra et al. (2004) interviewed 631 Egyptian women, 22% of whom had experienced violence by an intimate partner. Furthermore, Jahanfar and Malekzadegan (2007) found that 60.6% of the 1,800 pregnant Iranian women they interviewed had been subjected to various kinds of domestic violence, including sexual (23.5%), physical (14.6%), and psychological (60.5%).

Similarly, a survey of 1,324 pregnant Pakistani women conducted by Karmaliani et al. (2008) revealed that 51% of them had experienced physical,

sexual, or verbal abuse in the six months before and/or during their pregnancies. Another study by Usta et al. (2007) of 1,418 women in Lebanon who visited primary healthcare centers found that 35% of them had experienced domestic violence, including physical violence (66%) and verbal abuse (88%). In addition, through interviews with individuals living in refugee camps in Palestine, Khawaja et al. (2008) discovered that the majority of married men (60.1%) and women (61.8%) believe that wife-beating is justifiable under most circumstances. These same trends were revealed by Ahmed's (2007) survey of 146 Sudanese women at an outpatient clinic, 45.8% of whom were victims of domestic violence. Another study of 506 Turkish women at a healthcare facility found that 58% of them faced domestic violence (largely physical and psychological) recurrently and continuously (Alper et al., 2005). All these statistics from different Muslim-majority countries pose a serious threat to the contention that Islam recognizes and protects women's rights.

Summary Observations About Domestic Violence in the Muslim American Community

Sociodemographic assessments reveal that the occurrence of domestic violence among US Muslims ranges from 10% (Alkhateeb, 1999) to nearly 30%, of which 14% of women reported experiencing physical abuse in their current marriage and 17.5% in a previous marriage (Ghayyur, 2009). These figures are synchronous with those among the overall US population (NCADV, n.d.). According to a study by Killawi (2011), 12-18% reported experiencing physical abuse and 30-40% experienced emotional abuse. The Peaceful Families Project (2011) surveyed 801 Muslim American women and found that 31% had experienced abuse by an intimate partner and 53% had experienced some form of domestic violence during their lifetime.

In regard to the Muslim American community's acceptance of domestic violence, Kulwicki and Miller (1999) conducted a study of 202 Arab American homes comprising 162 women and 40 men (98% of whom were Muslim). The respondents endorsed a man's right to slap his wife if, according to them, the following conditions were met: 33% of men and 34% of women found it justified if she insulted him when they were at home alone, 43% of men and 17% of women deemed it appropriate if she disrespected him in public, and 59% of both women and men would endorse it if she hit him first during an argument (Kulwicki & Miller, 1999). Another study conducted by Alkhateeb (2009), one that used quantitative and qualitative interviews of executive directors of nine domestic violence organizations serving significant numbers of Muslim women, found that of the 1,962 Muslim women served annually, the average age was 32 and 85% of them were immigrants. These women had experienced several forms of domestic violence, including physical abuse (74%), sexual abuse (30%),

financial abuse (65%), emotional blackmailing or verbal abuse (82%), and spiritual abuse (49%) (Alkhateeb, 2009).

Crimes against women receive little attention, for the media seldom reports such incidents due to the Muslim American population's diverse composition and the majority of them being immigrants. Other factors, such as sociocultural norms (e.g., legal and religious practices), impede the probing and reporting of such crimes. Arab immigrants bring with them such cultural norms as not speaking out about abusive incidents that have occurred within their family. Such an introverted approach is a major obstruction for victims who decide to seek help, a cultural norm that also hinders law enforcement agencies and health professionals seeking to combat this health threat within this specific community (Abdullah, 2007).

Another study carried out by Abugideiri (2007) with 190 Muslims seeking mental health counseling in northern Virginia revealed that 41% experienced domestic violence in the form of physical (50%), sexual (14%), and verbal or psychological abuse (60%); 3% of respondents reported having a relative who had been killed. Of the respondents, 16% were children, 12% were adult males, and 71% were adult females.

To cater to the needs of abused women effectively, both secular advocates and faith leaders need to be aware of best practices for offering assistance. In certain situations, secular advocates might feel helpless when an abused woman refuses to speak out to protect her family's honor and safeguard her religious beliefs, even though doing so limits her chances for any recompense and might also perpetuate her victimization. Faith leaders may also have their own prejudices about women's "appropriate" roles and of their seeking assistance from secular resources, such as the criminal justice system. If secular and religious organizations understand their limitations and biases and seek knowledge to redress them, it will help them serve abused women more effectively (Hamid, 2015). Muslim victims of domestic violence may be aided in accessing services such as English language/literacy classes, legal consultation or advocacy, support groups, social services/public support, funding for a job training program, counseling for herself and her traumatized children, and access to transportation and/or driving lessons (Hamid, 2015).

The Role of Mosques and Imams

Another important Muslim American philanthropical institution is the mosque. These houses of worship contribute by preaching the teachings of Islam, offering community-building services, and appealing for contributions to help the needy. Chronicle records maintain that mosques existed in America as early as 1925. Barely 2% of them were founded before 1950 (Khan & Siddiqui, 2017). The US Mosque Survey, conducted in 2020, found there are presently 2,769 mosques, an

increase of 31% from 2010. This increase is the result of the growing Muslim population due to both immigration and the birth rate (Bagby, 2021).

An investigative study of 22 mosques in New York revealed that 96% of their participants recognized imams as counselors and that 74% had sought their counsel around safety issues (Abu-Ras et al., 2007). As abused immigrant women chiefly depend on their faith communities for support, they are prone to experience more victimization when confronted with a lack of support, denial, or silence from their clergy and congregations.

Both domestic violence survivors and advocates share that in most cases their religious and community leaders fail to acknowledge the presence of domestic violence (Johnson, 2015). Not only do imams need to acknowledge that violence occurs, but they also must challenge themselves to see if their cultural beliefs have influenced their perception of married women's rights to reflect those of the women to whom they preach. Not all imams have sufficient information or a clear understanding of the different forms of violence (e.g., emotional, physical, psychological, and spiritual) or the signs of domestic violence, as well as how to differentiate between intimate terrorism, violent resistance, and couple's situational conflicts (Johnson 2005). Some of them may simply see domestic abuse as an aspect of day-to-day disputes among couples and thus neither acknowledge it outright nor support the women. Therefore, they need to be vociferous about the Sharia's standpoint that domestic violence is an injustice (Alkhateeb, 2007; Choi et al., 2016).

Domestic violence advocates, usually women, who selflessly serve their communities and are misperceived as breaking up families, generally encounter a considerable amount of skepticism (Choi et al., 2016; Alkhateeb, 2007). Survivors of domestic violence will be empowered if imams support their views and speak out against domestic violence in sermons. Such actions will also unify their advocates and lend credence to their efforts. There is a strong possibility that Muslims who oppose the promotion of "feminist" or "pro-Western" mindsets in their community's imams will try to block such efforts by citing references to American society becoming more individualistic, the breakup of the family system, and the impact of the rising divorce rate on children due to women's liberation or feminist philosophy. However, such statements have been shown to promote domestic violence on the one hand and, on the other, to represent an outright denial of Islam's real spirit, which teaches peace, harmony, and congruence in society at large and in marital relationships in particular (Hamid, 2015).

There have been attempts to engage this important constituency. For example, ISNA has both conducted and included training sessions for imams about domestic violence prevention in their national and regional conferences.

The Peaceful Families Project has conducted trainings and promoted appropriate sermons as well.

ISNA's Efforts to Combat Domestic Violence 1997-2005

ISNA, formally founded in 1980, traces its roots to the Muslim Student Association of the US and Canada (MSA), established in 1963. A national umbrella organization that hosts an annual convention and regional conferences, ISNA publishes *Islamic Horizons* magazine, organizes youth programs, and has had interfaith relations with the US federal government since 2005. Its board is largely elected by individual members. Over time, ISNA has managed to achieve cognitive legitimacy (Siddiqui, 2014), a status that has allowed it to oppose domestic violence publicly through its programs.

For the purpose of this paper, we adopt Suchman's (1995) definition: "Legitimacy is a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate within certain socially constructed systems of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions." ISNA's legitimacy does not depend on specific events alone; rather, its long-term legitimacy depends on a collection of events or history. Nevertheless, we will see that its legitimacy was, at times, influenced by singular events. Legitimacy, which does not always reflect reality, is actually the perception of the organization or its reputation. In other words, it is "possessed objectively, yet created subjectively" (Suchman 1995), a social construct that can vary based on the audience. Any nonprofit organization, including ISNA, can be both legitimate and illegitimate, depending on the person or group making the judgment.

There are three broad types of legitimacy: pragmatic, moral, and cognitive. Pragmatic legitimacy is based on the self-interest of the organization's stakeholders. Support for ISNA depends on what value the constituents expect to receive, such as a direct personal benefit, his/her belief that ISNA furthers his/her overall beliefs, and that the organization cares about him/her. Under this frame, Muslim-American domestic violence activists would likely be willing to support ISNA if they felt ISNA would support their cause.

Moral legitimacy depends on whether ISNA's actions are justified, rather than whether they merely benefit the audience. It achieved moral legitimacy by operating in socially acceptable ways and due to the influence of its structure and organizational leaders' charisma. Nonprofit organizations' claims to resources are based on demonstrating their moral commitments (Ostrander & Schervish, 1990). In this framework, Muslim-American anti-domestic violence activists and others would support ISNA, if they perceived that its stands on this and related issues were morally correct.

ISNA attained cognitive legitimacy, the most powerful form of legitimacy, when people or institutions began believing that it was necessary or inevitable based on a taken-for-granted cultural framework.

Until 1991 (Gulf War I), ISNA largely benefitted from pragmatic legitimacy. At a time when Muslim American organizations were less developed institutionally at the national level, it provided representation, opportunities to network and connect, needed programs for community development, a way for the diaspora community to donate to causes back home, and tax exemption for local nonprofit organizations through its group tax exemption. ISNA's revenues depended on program activities, diaspora giving, and donations from the Persian Gulf and the US.

Between Gulf War I and 9/11, ISNA achieved moral legitimacy. Prior to that war and due to the funding it was receiving from the Middle East, ISNA was seen as dependent on international donations. Its opposition to US involvement in the war was regarded as breaking with Middle Eastern leaders and aligning itself with Muslim American public opinion, a move that resulted in deeper domestic financial support. The period of 1993-2005 was a time of deep programmatic engagement and institutional stability, for this domestic funding enabled ISNA to achieve cognitive legitimacy before 9/11.

Although managed by a professional staff and led by an executive director, the organization has been unable to transition away from its founders at the board level. In 2018, the membership elected Dr. Sayyid M. Syeed, who was president of the Council of Presidents (est. 1980), as its president. He had already served as its chief executive officer (1993-2005) and is a first-generation Muslim American immigrant. In fact, during the 2018 election no second-generation Muslim American won a seat on ISNA's board.

In 2019, ISNA hired Tayyab Yunus, a second-generation Muslim American to serve as its executive director. However, he left less than six months later after failing to help ISNA become more responsive to a more diverse audience of Muslim Americans. ISNA's cognitive legitimacy is best illustrated by its 2019 Annual Convention. Despite being very small compared to past ones and even with other Muslim American organizations' national conventions, it was the only Muslim American national convention to host Democratic presidential candidates Bernie Sanders and Julian Castro and comedian Trevor Noah. ISNA has been able to maintain its national standing due to its cognitive legitimacy and a core set of donors who continue to ensure its financial stability despite scant social returns in recent years. This level of legitimacy has allowed ISNA to reassert itself into the national Muslim American framework during the Covid-19 pandemic under the leadership of Basharat Saleem, its new executive director. Saleem has served in various ISNA roles for over 19 years and has played a national role in a membership association of American journalists.

ISNA's Efforts Against Domestic Violence

In 1997, ISNA's secretary general established a social services department in response to the grassroots community leaders and social services activists' suggestion that Muslim Americans were dealing with widespread issues, among them bullying, mental health, domestic and family violence, and substance abuse. As most Islamic centers considered these issues taboo, no widespread effort was undertaken to legitimize these activists' work. A safe space in which important religious frameworks could be established for these conversations was also needed. Although this department lasted less than two years, it did accomplish some important work in terms of organizing two annual conferences, bringing scholars and practitioners together, and providing important material for *Islamic Horizons* and programs for ISNA's annual and regional conferences. When this department was closed due to a lack of funding and disagreements between the director and secretary general, its efforts continued as part of a new association, the Islamic Social Services Association, for those who had been involved in these efforts.

However, due to the department's initial efforts (and success), ISNA continued to receive requests for help from families, Islamic center leaders, imams, and practitioners. The secretary general therefore tasked the newly formed community development department to organize appropriate activities. ISNA also took the controversial step of deciding not to collaborate with other national organizations to establish joint national anti-domestic violence efforts. There were likely a few reasons for this decision. First, ISNA was in a rebuilding mode and thus a scarcity mindset was at the center of most of its decisions and work. As Siddiqui (2014) suggests, the secretary general believed that the organization's past collaborations had birthed new organizations that had removed valuable resources, a development that eventually resulted in financial issues during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Second, as domestic violence is a delicate issue within the Muslim community, he was worried that a broad coalition may eventually be a hindrance due to the consistent need for consensus.

Consensus development, while great for community-building, can dilute the work against domestic violence. In fact, ISNA was already facing opposition from some of its board members who believed that such violence was limited and no more than a legal tool used by women in family law disputes! As the staff did not feel equipped to face internal challenges (which were professionally dangerous) while also dealing with external efforts to dilute their fight against it, going it alone seemed like the easiest path to take. Finally, ISNA lacked the administrative and financial resources needed for a true collaboration.

ISNA immediately sought activists in the community who would help its efforts. Fortunately, it was introduced to Bonita McGee, who had been involved in such efforts both within and outside the Muslim community. A young African

American Muslim leader, she was the ideal person to understand the limited but important role an organization like ISNA could play. She recommended that ISNA confine its efforts to 1) legitimize the work against domestic violence within the Muslim community; 2) be unequivocal concerning Islam's opposition to this practice; 3) convene meetings of imams, practitioners, and scholars to oppose it; 4) establish a bridge between work being done in the Muslim community and national-level efforts to reduce silos being developed; and 5) be a resource for non-Muslims to tackle domestic violence within the Muslim community. ISNA's secretary general appointed her ISNA National Chair for Muslims against Domestic Violence, and in that capacity she worked with the community development department to organize such efforts as convening conferences, placing articles in *Islamic Horizons*, and developing a website.

Between 1999 and 2003, the department hosted a series of small annual conferences on such topics as Muslims against Domestic Violence, Islamic Perspectives on Counseling, Dispute Resolution Training, and Imam Training on Domestic Violence. Because ISNA's board refused to authorize the necessary funding, the staff organized them at the ISNA headquarters in Plainfield, IN. The disagreements over these activities ran so deep that ISNA's accounting staff refused to release payments to vendors, thereby delaying planning activities. But despite these internal challenges, ISNA staff and volunteers managed to host and livestream (a new concept at that time) these events that brought together between 50 and 100 imams, community leaders, practitioners, and scholars and enabled others to join the conversation virtually.

Due to these volunteers' heightened involvement, these events were held at no additional cost to ISNA. As they were held on weekends, staff donated their time. Fortunately, these smaller conferences resulted in some real anti-domestic violence champions, such as Imam Mohamad Magid of Virginia, who gradually became an important figure within ISNA. In addition to serving on its executive council and board, as well as its vice president and president, he also provided political cover for staff and these activities internally. In 2009, in response to Aasiya Zubair's murder, Imam Magid issued a statement calling for a change in Muslims' attitudes about domestic violence and a robust plan of action to fight against this scourge (Hammer, 2019). These conferences, although small, featured important speakers and topics that became part of ISNA's annual conference and regional conferences.

These efforts resulted in articles appearing in *Islamic Horizons*, which amplified the cause. They also appeared on ISNA's new internet weekly news show that was broadcast through the organization's website.

ISNA developed a Muslims against Domestic Violence website that included a toolkit and materials, developed by scholars and practitioners. These materials were presented at its annual conference; McGee was its architect. ISNA

started receiving copyright permission requests from mainstream national organizations against domestic violence to reproduce them in their own publications. The website also enabled ISNA to state unequivocally that Islam forbids all forms of domestic violence and reiterate its position on gender equality. As important as these events were, they were short-lived because of the departure of key staff, including Sayyid Syeed and one of the coauthors of this article.

As Hammer (2019) notes, Muslim religious leaders developed a normative Islamic marriage model that proposed three important points: domestic violence exists within the Muslim community, a position that ISNA's leaders were not willing to openly embrace between 1997 and 2005; it should not exist; and that it is un-Islamic because it negates the Quranic requirement of a "tranquil marriage model" (Hammer, 2019).

Conclusion

This article seeks to illustrate the engagement of a national organization in the efforts to combat domestic violence. While much of the literature related to Muslim efforts in this regard highlight the work of activists, this article sheds light on the work of a Muslim organization that was not part of that network. A number of important national, regional, and local organizations now exist to combat it.

ISNA's efforts differed in several ways. First, its efforts were not initiated by activists. Although Syeed and Siddiqui personally disagreed with domestic violence, prior to engaging in this work they would not have been considered activists. Part of their broad mandate to help community challenges was to find ways to solve problems at the grassroots level. Thus, they had to turn to an activist and leader like McGee who could better guide this work. Second, the widespread Muslim activities against domestic violence were being done by "non-establishment figures," for the community leaders fighting it were also fighting the national, regional, and local community-elected leaders. As ISNA was largely considered "part of the establishment," its efforts to uplift and amplify these activists were unique at that time.

In addition, ISNA also faced internal and external challenges in the form of vocal board members who opposed the community development department's work, although the board had established it. Its programs, therefore, received little or no additional funding. ISNA's inability to educate and take its board on this journey ensured that these efforts would be short-lived. Finally, ISNA refused to collaborate with other "establishment" Muslim American organizations and chose to work with activists. A great deal of the research on Muslim efforts to combat domestic violence has been confined to the work of activists. ISNA's efforts enable researchers to examine how Muslim American non-activists sought to deal with this specific challenge.

This article is an important contribution to the literature on the work of non-domestic violence activists within the Muslim community. However, new avenues of research also need to be pursued. First, researchers should examine how this tension between the fear of Islamophobia while confronting issues of domestic violence has impacted fundraising. Was this work funded through external grants or Muslim American donors? What were these donors' motivations, challenges, and belief systems? Second, what kind of backlash or challenges did non-domestic violence activists face within the local, regional, or national contexts? Third, how important was the investment of federal, state, local, and foundation grants in furthering this campaign? Fourth, what challenges did these activists face while pursuing federal, state, local, and foundation grants? Finally, as documented above, ISNA's efforts were dependent upon a few internal and an external champion. This raises the question of what efforts must organizations like ISNA undertake to institutionalize such work? This is an important question, one that can help broaden organizational efforts to oppose domestic violence in the Muslim-American community.

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Special Section: Healing

Trauma, Witness, and Healing: Muslim Women Artists on Domestic Violence

Juliane Hammer

"God was the first to attend to my story." This is the first sentence from Naima's poem, "Paperweight" which she describes as a poem about desire, identity, and finding comfort in another person. It was also the sentence that, for artist Nadia, best represented the theme of the 2011 art exhibit of Muslim Women in the Arts, an organization in the DC metropolitan area that for several years organized an annual art exhibition with works by Muslim women artists. In 2011, she chose "Healing & Empowerment: Violence, Women & Art" as the theme of the exhibition. The image that accompanied this key sentence, a painting by Nadia, shows a Muslim woman with a scarf who is raising her hands in supplication.

In this article, I read and represent art pieces from the exhibition in 2011, on display for one evening, within a framework that connects the story telling of survivors with awareness of various forms of violence against women and the power and possibility of healing for those who have been traumatized by such violence. The artists reflected and refracted layers of their own awareness and experiences of gender-based violence to then produce art pieces that were intended to open up their audiences to that awareness as well. The connection between trauma, empowerment, and healing is powerfully explored in many of the pieces themselves and in the reception of the exhibit as well. The theme of the exhibit was broader than my own focus on domestic violence and reflected the intersecting nature of violence within and around interpersonal relations.

In addition to attending the exhibition, I interviewed over half of the women artists involved. I also participated in several planning meetings and helped set up the exhibition at the Silver Spring Civic Building. I have struggled here again with the promise of confidentiality extended to those artists I interviewed and the planning conversations I observed and the very public nature of the exhibition and of art pieces. I have opted for an approach in which I analyze some of the art pieces in relation to their interpretation by the respective artist while offering insights and stories from the interviews without identifying the artists, not even with a pseudonym.

The structure of the article is determined by a number of themes I recognized in the art pieces, the interviews, and the conversations surrounding the exhibit. In addition to conducting the interviews and observations in 2011, I also took photographs of the art pieces at the exhibit, and of accompanying explanations if there were any. I have been revisiting and 're-seeing' them often

since then and have connected them to the other dimensions of my project on US Muslim efforts against domestic violence.[1] In that way, my 're-seeing' has been shaped by my increasing knowledge of both the faces and facets of domestic violence in Muslim communities and the mosaic of Muslim efforts to end it. My own readings and responses are one particular window into the art and the artists who produced it. Seven themes emerged from my contemplation of the visual art pieces, and they bring together descriptions of particular pieces with insights from interviews and observations.

In what follows, I am taking the reader on a virtual walk of the exhibition the way I arranged it after months of contemplating the pieces and what I knew about them. This arrangement is different from the original exhibition, which did not have such themes. Back in 2011, pieces by the same artist were placed close to each other. There were displays on larger and smaller easels and tables positioned in various spaces in the center. This arrangement created the possibility for viewers to see and recognize the individual pieces and the artists as connected to each other and to the theme of the exhibit. The spatial *situatedness* of the art pieces worked in tandem with the presence and positioning of the artists. The viewers at the gallery had the opportunity to consider art pieces and ask the artists questions. The presence of the women artists also added a dimension of Muslim female embodiment to the physical nature of the artworks displayed. The seven parts of my exhibit are called: *Trauma, Culture, Despair, Solace, Process, Support, and Healing*. The article ends with a reflection on responses to the exhibition on the one hand and its impact on the artists on the other.

Trauma

A woman is screaming, her mouth wide open, her eyes on the camera. She has threaded her hands into her hair and seems to be pulling on it as blood runs down her bare forearms. The blood is very red, the hair is very black, and the photograph is urgent and loud. I want to look away. I don't like the sight of blood, and I want her to stop screaming.

The photograph, called "Inside Out," by Afia, was probably the most graphic of all the pieces in the exhibit. I did want to look away and I hesitated in looking at it every time I considered the art pieces. Afia wanted to let people know that this kind of trauma and pain does happen to people, and it happens in Muslim communities. And it is called "Inside Out" because sometimes the real injuries are not on the outside, but on the inside, and those cannot be seen. She had considered making the woman even more bruised but then decided she would

[1] See Juliane Hammer, *Peaceful Families: American Muslim Efforts against Domestic Violence* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

instead be screaming and thus would not be a silent victim. She asked a family member to model for her photographs, which I found to be profoundly symbolic in also making the point that DV happens in families and communities, so it is personal and not a distant issue.

Three black and white photographs of three women. The first woman, with bruises around her eyes and blood running down the side of her nose, is covering her ears with her hands. The second woman, partially covering her eyes with her hands, has blood and bruises around her mouth and chin. The third woman, covering her mouth with one hand, has a black eye and parallel, bloodied scratches on her chest. All three women are looking into the camera, imploringly, intensely, and directly. I cannot only be shocked. What can I do?

This series, "Hear No Evil, See No Evil, Speak No Evil," also by Afia, has a different effect on me. The choice to make them black and white moves the focus of my attention away from the injuries and towards the women's facial expressions, which draws me in even deeper. Afia said she wanted the series to help survivors see that they are not alone, and she wanted the community to acknowledge that this could happen to any of them and is happening to many more than we know about. In first reactions, when she shared the pictures, she found that people thought these were real victims. Afia explained that the photographs were staged but that the victims are real. Some people were scared of the pictures and older community and family members did not like the graphic nature of them. She wanted that reaction and found that younger viewers already knew that such abuse happens and were thus less shocked at seeing it.

On a vivid red background, with a chain all around the rectangular canvas, a black record is broken into pieces and only held together by small pieces of white tape, each saying "Hope." The record is partially covered by an album cover, white, with a black heart and the Latin phrase, "Amor Vincit Omnia…" written on it in black pen. In the left bottom corner there are red rosebuds, and the right side of the frame is filled with crushed and broken pieces of rose petals. The piece speaks to me even before I see the title, "How many times can a record break & still play music?"

Nadia, the artist who created the piece, decided to provide an explanation that was displayed alongside the artwork during the exhibit. In it, she explained how love, hope, the record, the album cover, the flower petals, and the chain came together to describe the trauma of abuse, especially emotional abuse. Love, for Nadia, was "a powerful thing but loving something or someone" also gives "them the power to destroy us." The record "symbolizes life and how it turns. In this piece it is specifically representative of how we allow emotional abuse to repeat over and over and over again." The album cover represents the ways in which we

mask what is truly happening in our minds and hearts and keeps the eyes of the world outside away from how broken we are inside. The chain is wrapped around the art piece to "symbolize captivity." We can be stuck and helpless even if we recognize our situation and "there are a lot more obstacles to face in order to be set free."

Each of the three pieces centers on the trauma that is caused by various forms of violence. There are physical injuries, which seem to have become a given. Perhaps we *do* get used to images of trauma and injury and become indifferent to them? There is so much focus on physical violence, also in legal and criminal justice proceedings and in awareness work that through its very exposure it simultaneously becomes invisible. The art makes the embodied nature of physical violence real and tangible again while also creating a layer of distance from the trauma of real wounds, broken limbs, ripped skin, and bleeding tissue. Even the scars are printed and painted on canvas, paper, or fabric, not permanently etched onto someone's skin. The trauma represented in art provides a space, or a gap, between the viewer and the physical violence but brings her a step closer to the many other ways in which human beings can be broken, hurt, and torn. The scars of emotional violence become physical in the sharp edges of the broken record and the black and white contrast of the imploring eyes of victims.

That the trauma is real for the artists, at least through the lives of family members, friends, and community members, if not in their own lives, becomes clear in my conversations and interviews. I struggled with what I saw as direct disclosures of abuse experiences when they happened and then again when I had to decide how to write about them. I chose here to tell most of the stories in the third person; as if they had happened to someone my interlocutors knew but not themselves. There were stories where I suspected that they were not third person accounts, but the risk of exposing the artists and their lives in this way is great and I see no marked difference in exposing the stories as their own. If these stories were told to them, they would indeed be equally "real."

One artist told me about a fellow artist friend she lost:

> She was a designer, a very beautiful young woman, with four children. One day, at one o'clock in the morning I got an email from the gallery that she is dead. Her husband killed her with a baseball bat, her four children were in the next room, and she was just beaten to death. We were in touch with her; we were going to these shows and exhibitions together, and we had no idea that she was holding back so much. We found out when she died. And then her children had to be adopted by different families. I heard later that two families adopted two each of the children and they bought houses together so that the children could be together.

Another woman spoke about her friend in Europe who "was married against her will, typical relationship, male ego, and everything. She was under a lot of stress, facing a lot of violence, physical, emotional, sexual, and everything. I was here so I couldn't do much for her; that was really bad. I was feeling helpless; couldn't do anything for her other than praying, and at that point praying wasn't enough for her."

One told the story of a neighbor who was married to a man when she was 18 years old. She lived next door to her in-laws and was mentally abused by both her husband and her mother-in-law. They took away her phone and cut her off from friends and family. This went on for several years, and she had two children. Eventually she ran away. The imam of the community got involved, but encouraged her to go back. She could not go back and had to leave her children with her husband. She won visitation rights in court, but her husband would not allow her contact with her children. The artist telling the story pointed out how in this woman's story "the system" failed her as well.

Another artist told me about a cousin who was sexually abused by an uncle and was for years too ashamed to tell anyone. When she finally did, her father refused to cut off contact with the abuser and the young woman was forced to see him at family gatherings. Eventually, the parents of the woman distanced themselves, somewhat subtly, from the relative but he was never confronted or held accountable. In private conversation, the cousin would open up about her fears about ever getting married and having a fulfilling sexual life.

In this exhibition, in the artworks and in the words of the artists, the victims were always present. They haunted me and pushed me to keep writing, even in the face of the secondary trauma I seemed to be experiencing. They filled the empty spaces between the art pieces, and they connected the artists with each other and with viewers as they considered each piece of art individually and all the artworks together.

Culture

A young woman, no, perhaps a girl, is looking into the camera with large dark brown eyes. She does not smile and her head and neck are adorned with a headscarf and collar adorned with shiny beads and gold and silver thread embroidery. Her head is tilted to the left and she seems to want me to see something, to say something, and perhaps also to do something?

It is the title of Afia's third piece, "Child Bride", that brings home the intended message. The girl in the picture is too young to be married; she is still a child. I placed the photograph in this section on culture because Afia explained the presence of this piece in the exhibit through her concerns about Muslim cultural contexts in which girls are forced to get married too early. She had read a newspaper article about child brides in Yemen and wanted to bring this important

issue into the conversation. She had remarked before that with her artwork she wanted to speak on behalf of victims because "there is so much silence in our culture."

The child bride in her photograph is joined by four paintings, all by the same artist, Saadia. Saadia had found the theme of the exhibition very challenging and had struggled with how to convey specific ideas she had. She read materials from the Peaceful Families Project, including the book, *Change from Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities*,[2] which contains survivor stories and research articles about DV in different parts of the world, as well resources for advocates and imams. In the end, she decided to focus on

> …things in my culture that could be considered to be forms of violence against women. Whatever you see in the media, sure, there is ill that exists everywhere in the world, but sometimes in countries like mine there is more attention given to one or two cases. If you see any of my paintings, I painted what I saw in our culture. It was about freedoms, about veils, about different things that affect our society but that can be changed if a woman fights enough for it.

A child, in a painting that is four feet tall, stands motionless, and shyly looks to the side. She is wearing an ornate outfit, with a knee-long dress, loose pants, a headscarf with a beaded edge, and another heavy looking mantle that frames her small figure. The girl is painted in black and white.

This painting is called "Don't Marry Me." Like Afia, Saadia was concerned with the practice of child marriage and wanted to represent that concern in one of her paintings. She described child marriage as inflicting violence on young girls, which is something that happens in isolated parts of many nations:

> Particularly in Afghanistan I see this a lot, young kids getting married, and they justify it religiously, which is ridiculous. It's not religious, it is cultural. It was interesting; there was an African American woman at the exhibit who saw the girl as an African bride, and another one who saw an Indian girl. But for me it was an Afghan bride who was being forced into marriage, and the black and white was supposed to show her sorrow. She is a little kid. In Pakistan and Afghanistan, they encourage people to get married very young and say that it is to suppress sexual desire – what does

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[2] Maha Alkhateeb and Salma Abugideiri (eds.), *Change From Within: Diverse Perspectives on Domestic Violence in Muslim Communities* (Herndon: Peaceful Families, 2007).

> a twelve-year old know about sex or desire? They use culture to justify stuff like this – it is completely ridiculous.

A woman with a scarf is looking through what looks like an opening in a curtain. One eye is visible and part of her mouth and nose. The split in the curtain is held open by her hands; two fingers on each hand pry it open. One side of the curtain is red with ornate black floral patterns, and the other side is a light yellow with similar decorations.

This piece is called "Piercing through the Veil," and it was intended to represent the ways in which Afghan women are expected to stay home and be seen in public as little as possible. The woman in the painting is looking at the outside, but she cannot be part of it. Even though the use of the word piercing in the title seems to imply the need for change, Saadia said that she also had good and very sweet memories of life inside, "behind the veil" so to speak.

In a colorful room with carved wall decorations and a soft carpet, a woman sits cross-legged, facing the viewer. She is wearing a traditional yellow, red, and green outfit, a headdress with golden coins and a flowing white veil, and her two braids flow down to her lap. She holds a rose in one hand and prayer beads in the other. Behind her stands a figure in a burqa, beige and gray, like a shadow.

In this painting, called "Freedoms," Saadia reflected on the different ways in which women in Afghanistan perceive opportunities and restrictions. She said that many women are content with their lives and that freedom, to do things, to be a professional, to select a spouse, and many others, do not come to them, they have to be fought for. The two women in the painting represent the women who did fight and achieved freedoms and those who did not.

Saadia used the framework of culture in a way we have encountered before, not as the bad counterpart to good religion, but as a framework for understanding different practices and ethics while also allowing for the possibility of change, because in her paintings culture is negotiable, not static. She did accuse particular people in her country, but not her culture, of abusing religion to justify certain practices when it was clear to her that they were not religiously sanctioned.

Culture, with various valences and meanings, appeared frequently in the interviews and preparation conversations. The artists used culture to describe family and community practices of silencing, of ignoring, and of consequently becoming responsible for the plight and suffering of victims. The culture of silence was usually not identified as specifically Muslim or ethnic, but was recognized as universal in the same way all the many forms of abuse are universal. This has of course not prevented those hostile to Muslims, but also to

immigrants more broadly, from using culture as a tool for marking Muslims and their practices as foreign, not belonging in the U.S. and as unfit to participate in American society. On the other hand, culture can be seen in the work of Muslim artists and advocates as a tool to reject patriarchal practices as foreign to religion and a liability for religious activists trying to combat racism and ethnocentrism, as well as sexual abuse and violence.

Several artists juxtaposed the rights of women in this country, the U.S., to call the police, to complain about abuse, to get a divorce with situations in other countries where those rights are not available if victims do not know about them. Women are also further abused by pressure that is put on them to not report, to not complain, and to keep the family together at all costs. One woman described her ethnic cultural context as dominated by gentlemen, hospitable women, and not the stereotypes everyone has about them. Rather, cases of abuse, which she had heard about but that had not happened in her extended family, were considered aberrations from a cultural norm in which women are respected and honored and men are responsible for keeping them that way. I heard echoes here of protective patriarchy that would allow the artist to hold abusers accountable within the framework she had presented.

To one artist, there are aspects of culture that should not exist, but they do and they can be changed:

> Back home, if a woman is abused and she doesn't know her rights, she won't tell anybody, especially in the countryside. She will say, he is my husband, and I am like, he doesn't have to beat you… There are some here, they come and they have language problems, they don't speak English, some men get women from the countryside, with no education. Her concept of life is just to satisfy their husbands, having kids, and staying home. Those are the victims; they can easily be abused. Some of the women are even ashamed to talk about it – that's what I meant by culture, they get shamed by people, they are afraid of their family, the reaction of her parents. And the parents would not be on her side, which is sad. It is a part of the culture that still exists.

One rather fascinating appearance of culture came in the form of several discussions on the acceptance of art as a form of expression in Muslim communities and families. One artist described her art as a fusion between eastern and western ways of creating, and saw herself as an aesthetic bridge between the two. Another narrated how difficult it was for her family to accept that she wanted to express herself visually and in forms that they did not find familiar. Even before this exhibit with its arguably rather controversial topic, her family was concerned about how she would be perceived in the community but also how such perception would affect her (and her sisters') ability to get married.

Another woman artist looked at art making very differently:

> I took a huge step back and asked myself, what is the significance of having art and artists in society? The conclusion that I came to was that being an artist makes you a better human being. And I have always thought that Allah has bestowed a little bit more of a favor upon those of us who are artists because we have a very clear facilitative path to communicating with Him… As you grow as an artist, your subconscious and your conscious become more aligned and often your subconscious and your intuition knows more about what is right than your conscious does.

One artist represented herself as rooted in American cultural ways of "doing art" and referenced several African American artists and writers as her inspiration. She, along with several others, also referred to culture in order to describe their own contributions to artistic production: they were cultural producers, in conversation with different audiences and across communal and social lines. Some also saw themselves as cultural translators who wanted to explain certain issues within their communities to "the outside world" and thus actively challenge existing negative and stereotypical representations.

Despair

A woman with black hair, partly covered by a scarf, sits with her knees pulled close to her chest and her hands resting on top of her knees. Her head is tilted to the side, and she is leaning her cheek on her folded hands. The background looks like a dark window or perhaps the sky has gone dark? Her pose is one of resigned fatigue, she has given up, and there is nothing but despair. At the right bottom corner of the charcoal drawing are two lines of Urdu poetry that read: "When all the hopes have died, why should one have any complaints and keep any expectations?"[3] Two frames are glued around the woman in despair; one is stamped clay with an embossed floral pattern and the other ripped pieces of red paper that look like drops of blood.

This piece, by Nida, is called "Despair" but I did not need to see the title to recognize the pose and its meaning. The sadness is palpable and even the embossed frame around the woman cannot raise my (or her spirits). The piece represents a woman, many women, who, because of physical and emotional abuse, have lost all hope. Nida wanted to represent that the violence they are going through comes from men in the male-dominated culture and society of the

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[3] This is a couplet from a ghazal by the famous Urdu poet Ghalib (1797-1869) who lived at the end of the Mughal Empire. His poems are very popular with Urdu speakers. I read the lines to mean that he is experiencing so much despair that there is not even any despair possible. I am grateful to Saadia Yacoob for helping me with the translation and with locating the source of the couplet.

subcontinent. The message of both the drawing and the poetry is one of utmost despair. Unlike the artworks I categorized as reflecting trauma, both physical and emotional, the pieces in this group are held together by an overwhelming sense of hopelessness; all energy and will to do anything having disappeared. There is no move to fight back or even to escape, only bleakness.

The head of a woman with dark curly hair, her face contorted in a scream so loud that her mouth is wide open, her eyes are closed, and her left hand is pulling on her hair. Around her are yellow and green pipes. One of the pipes has burst and is spraying water across the painting. This is a different kind of despair, the kind that expresses itself in helpless screams. The woman is at the end of her endurance; she cannot go on as she has before. The pipe has burst because it, too, was beyond endurance and filled past its capacity. I imagine the pipe making a screeching, hissing noise, as the water escapes from its body.

The painting, by Fatimah, is called "The Leak," and, like several other works in the exhibit, it had an immediate impact on me as I viewed it. Some paintings needed explanations while others, like this one, spoke on their own. The woman's frustration and desperation were so vivid and palpable; it was hard to look away.

The first thing I see is the dark silhouette of a hand, in the very left corner of the drawing. There is, perhaps, the shadowy outline of a woman, behind a screen, a curtain, or a window. The hand is clearly outlined with lighter areas around it. As I look more closely, the art piece becomes even more eerie: There are two pieces of rope dangling on both sides of the shadow figure. The woman behind the screen would be kneeling, her hand pressed against the cold glass, and her posture one of hopelessness. The source and form of her suffering are obscured and the sense of despair is exacerbated by the shades of grey and black that dominate the charcoal drawing.

This piece is one of Lamia's contributions to the exhibit. It is called "Emotionally Abused" and it is this title that helps the viewer interpret the source of the woman's suffering and despair. Emotional abuse appears often in discussions of DV, and it is regularly accompanied by statements that contradict an old English children's song: "sticks and stones will break my bones, but words will never harm me."[4] In these statements and reflections it becomes clear that the injuries and scars of verbal and emotional abuse can run as deep, if not deeper, than those caused by physical violence. Lamia's drawing was intended to draw

[4] The song was apparently meant to teach children to ignore taunting remarks from others.

attention to the potentially invisible wounds of emotional abuse and the difficulty in letting others know that it is occurring because it cannot be seen.[5]

The fourth piece in this section is a poem accompanied by a silk painting, both by Rabia. The silk painting, on a green and pink background, read the words *Allahu Akbar* (Allah is Great) in blue lines of Arabic calligraphy with golden edging. The poem is called, "Agony of the Skies," and Rabia wrote it one day when she felt completely overwhelmed by stories of abuse, war, and crisis in her own social circles and all over the world. Her other silk pieces are usually full of color, of flowers and swirls that represent hope and healing as possibilities, even for survivors of domestic violence. The first stanza of the poem reads:

The world is spinning around me
I see nothing but the webs
The brutality is beyond any thoughts
The cries and the bloodshed

It goes on to describe how the pain of abuse, violence, and war she sees grips her more and does not allow her soul to heal. She wants to close her eyes to the horror but when she opens them again the suffering is still there. The poem ends with her unfulfilled yearning for change and her prayer for mercy.

To include the theme of despair in my virtual exhibit was important to me because too often we forget how prevalent domestic abuse is, how trapped victims feel, both by the circumstances of their current trauma and/or by memories of past abuse that never leave them. In the activist modes of awareness and change, it can become difficult to remember that many victims do not and cannot report their abuse, cannot ask for help, and sometimes cannot even name their circumstances as abusive. It is here that despair reigns and hopelessness is abundant.

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[5] The United Kingdom passed a law in late 2015 that makes emotionally abusive behavior a punishable offence:
"Domestic abusers who subject victims to controlling or coercive behavior could face up to five years in jail under a new law which comes into force today (29 December 2015). The new legislation will mean the CPS can for the first time prosecute specific offences of domestic abuse if there is evidence of repeated, or continuous, controlling or coercive behavior. This type of abuse in an intimate or family relationship can include a pattern of threats, humiliation and intimidation, or behaviour such as stopping a partner socialising, controlling their social media accounts, surveillance through apps and dictating what they wear. Controlling or coercive behaviour causes someone either: to fear that violence will be used against them on at least two occasions; or, serious alarm or distress which has a substantial effect on their usual day-to-day activities." See Crown Prosecution Service, http://www.cps.gov.uk/news/latest_news/new_domestic_abuse_law_introduced/, last accessed 1/2/17.

There is another dimension to despair I want to remember: Despite decades of awareness work, better tools provided through the legal system, and many more organizations and networks that offer services to victims, the statistical incidents of domestic violence in American society have not decreased significantly. In conversations with DV advocates, this is a dimension of burnout they do not usually directly link with their own fatigue. When an organization or leader calls for the "end of domestic violence in Muslim communities," I worry about the absoluteness of this goal and wonder whether there is a way to put the bar lower, by vowing to struggle for an end to DV in Muslim families.

Solace

A woman with a headscarf, her face in profile, with her head bowed, is resting her forehead on her hand. The painting is beautifully colored with subtle shades of yellow, pink, orange, red, green, blue, and gray. The woman's posture reflects worry and perhaps also despair? Her pose and the colors seem to be at odds with each other. Her headscarf, her face, and her hand are suffused with soft light.

This piece, by Huda, is called "Inner Thoughts." She explained that the painting also has an Arabic title, "Khawatir," which means thoughts or ideas but can also be a form of non-rhyming poetry.[6] To her, the woman is thinking, but she is not hopeless or desperate. She pointed out that both the headscarf and the face of the woman look like flowers when the viewer first approaches the painting. It is large in size, which to her emphasized its focus on beauty and on the play of colors.

There are two large painting next to each other. One shows a woman in profile, her hands raised in supplication. She is a lighter silhouette on a dark brown and gray background. The color of the background is repeated in Arabic writing that covers her scarf, her face, and the rest of the painting. Not all of the Arabic script is legible. What is legible spells two verses from the Qur'an: "And behold, with every hardship comes ease; verily, with every hardship comes ease," (Qur'an 94:5-6; "Fa inna ma'l-'usra yusran; inna ma'l-'usra yusran").[7]

The second painting, with a background of orange and red, shows a woman with a headscarf, her face turned directly to the viewer, and a large tear on her cheek.

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[6] http://www.huda-art.com/artwork_paintings_figurative_paintings.htm

[7] The chapter in the Qur'an, 94, is called "The Opening Up of the Heart" and addresses the Prophet Muhammad to tell him that God had opened his heart, lifted his burden from him that weighed heavily on him, and raised him high in dignity. After the reminder that with hardship comes ease, Muhammad is told to remain steadfast, once he has been freed from his distress turn to his Sustainer with love.

This painting, too, is covered in writing, in a deep blue, and with words in both English and Arabic. Some of the English phrases are legible: "I wish to see my heart, my inner thoughts... I wish to swim in the veins of my inner thoughts... I wish to see what I can't see in my eyes... so I can feel... I am going... which no one knows..."

The two paintings are both very tall and narrow (almost 6 feet by 20 inches), and in the exhibition, they were placed next to each other. Huda described them as two pieces of a series. In the exhibition the first one was titled "Hardship & Ease" while on Huda's artist website, almost the same piece is called "After Every Hardship There Comes Ease," a more direct reference to the Qur'anic verse it was inspired by. The second piece was called "I wish" in the exhibition but is listed on Huda's website as "Inner Thoughts II" thus linking it with the first painting (above) in our theme of *Solace* as well.[8]

I want to quote Huda here directly to help explain the layers of meaning in "Hardship & Ease":

> It's referring to the healing process that these women can go through. It's black charcoal on plywood and it is also the female face, in the position of making *du'a* with the cupped hands. So it is referring to cultural and religious references, female identity, and reference to healing from the Qur'an, through the selected verse from the Qur'an, "and after every hardship there comes ease." That is true for everything that every woman can go through in her life, or any individual, it doesn't have to be a woman. In our lives sometimes we encounter things that are very difficult but if we are patient enough Allah will replace it with something better, and if we have the real understanding of the secrets of the Qur'an.
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> The painting is very long, it is the size of a door and that is referring to another thing which is that sometimes we just want to shut the door and forget about things, but this door can also be an opening of good things, if you open it and explore other avenues. The smoky background, it's black, it's dark, it refers to the hardship that one goes through, but you can get out of it. And the best time that you can resort to Allah and to His help is during the night when you are alone and when you can seek his help and guidance to get you through difficult times.

According to Huda, the second painting is the daytime companion to the first. It is colorful and the woman is facing the viewer to show what she is going through, and she is facing society with her thoughts in English and Arabic to make a statement about being a Muslim woman in America.

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[8] http://www.huda-art.com/artwork_calligraphy_painting_with_text.htm

The last art piece in this section is a charcoal drawing of hands open in Muslim supplication. The hands are surrounded by what looks like a halo of light or the rays of the sun emanating from behind them.

The drawing, by Lamia, is called "Doua" which means supplication in Arabic.[9] The theme of supplication, of opening one's hands to receive blessing from God has appeared several times already and continues in this piece. Lamia was reluctant to explain any of her pieces during the exhibit when people walked up and asked questions, but she stayed close to her pieces for most of the time. She expressed concern about how viewers would connect her to her art pieces and that they might assume that they were based on her own experiences even if that was not actually the case. If she distanced herself, they would think she did not want to acknowledge any abuse experience in her own life. This exchange illustrates both the complications of asking artists to explain the meaning of their work and to assume the meaning of artworks to be connected to their own lives rather than considering the possibility that they are speaking for and on behalf of others, especially related to this exhibition's theme. I am also reminded of the complicated ways in which non-white artists are often confined to representing various facets of their identity, including poets, novelists, and visual artists, while white artists are perceived as unmarked and thus able to write, create, and speak for anyone they choose. Not only are the women artists themselves identifying as Muslim women artists, but by engaging with the theme of violence they also run the risk of being reduced to victims of abuse themselves and being saddled with the assumption that it was their own abuse that inspired their artworks. This possibility has to be taken seriously as a risk, especially connected to the stigma and shame that can accompany the disclosure of victim and survivor status in Muslim communities and families. It is a risk made even more threatening because the range of abuse experiences addressed in the exhibition included child sexual abuse and sexual assault both within Muslim families/communities and in the context of war and conflict in Muslim majority societies.

The role of religion, Islam, as a source of guidance and solace in the artworks is illustrated by the pieces in this section. Visually, there are Arabic words, specifically quotes from the Qur'an, represented in calligraphy, but also poses of prayer and supplication and perhaps rather ubiquitously, women who wear headscarves. That articles of Muslim clothing, embodied forms of prayer and words, and phrases from scripture are present in the works of self-identified, Muslim, women artists is perhaps not surprising. That headscarves, Qur'anic

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[9] "Doua" is how Lamia decided to spell the word – I have spelled it "du'a" in other places in this article.

references, and Muslim prayer poses become easy representations of Muslim authenticity, as well as perhaps tropes of representation, is worth pointing out as well.

In a reflection on what Islam is in relation to domestic violence, another artist opined that Islam had given women rights and that Islam protects women, but sometimes women have no education so they don't know their rights. They have Muslim beliefs, but they do not study what Islam actually says about different things. She was adamant that domestic violence is wrong according to Islam. When I challenged her and asked whether other Muslims would agree with her on that statement, she said: "Everybody who has Islam in his heart, who gets the point of it, who is smart enough to see it, to see the real meaning, yes, they would."

This question was not without struggle for another woman who had heard many times that "the Qur'an said you could beat your wife. They don't follow, what is written, I think. They interpret it the way they want to. It's ironic, the Qur'an, the Arabic is the same, but the interpretations have given it so many different meanings. I have heard people say that it is allowed – I still don't believe that!" She had done some searching and had found that in Surat al-Nisa' (chapter four) of the Qur'an, there were interpretations that linked the verses (she did not remember the numbers) to the permission of beating the wife if she denied intercourse. She was unsure and kept saying that she should know better. But then she also said: "But beating like this, every day, torturing the woman, no, that is not permitted, it is not." In the process of doing research, finding legal interpretations and applications of passages in the Qur'an, she realized that there are many interpretations by different scholars, in different languages and from different time periods. She trusted things she found in her native language more than information in English. She decided that the Qur'an needed to be interpreted according to the time the interpreter lives in and according to what is considered appropriate. I was struck by her repeated reliance on authoritative scholars as sources of acceptable opinions, which she combined with the demand that one should only follow majority opinions that have been confirmed by many other scholars. In direct contradiction to this statement, she repeatedly said that in her heart she always knew that abuse and violence in a marriage were wrong. This was by far the most direct statement from any of the artists reflecting the ethic of non-abuse as pre-existing and conveyed through conviction as a feeling in the heart.

Only one of the artists mentioned that she did not need Islam to explain that abuse and violence were wrong, "as a human being, I know what is right and what is wrong." Her skepticism came in part from her frustration with religious leaders and authority figures and the ways in which she had seen them handle (or rather, not acknowledge) cases of abuse. She was not interested in involving any

of the leaders in the preparations for the exhibit because she feared that they would overwhelm the group of women artists with their claims to authority. At the end of our conversation, she acknowledged though that, "even if I don't need Islam to know what is right, for other women Islam is important and knowing the right interpretations can be empowering the same way or even more than the art pieces we are creating." For her then, the solace did not come from religion, but from the making of art. She gestured towards the important tension that existed between the preparation of the art pieces and the exhibit, the planning and fund-raising, the negotiation of deadlines, commitments, and catering needs on one hand, or in short, the *Process*, and the presentation of the art as a product and event on the other.

Process

Pieces of tile, in blue, brown, green, white, and beige, irregular in shape, are embedded in beige, sandy grout and surrounded by a rough wooden frame painted in a brownish gray. The tile fragments have sharp and sometimes jagged edges. One object is rectangular and the second is a square.

Both pieces are called "Broken." They were among several more three-dimensional art objects made by Jenine. She was an architect by training and profession and engaged in mixed media artistic work "on the side." For the exhibit she had created pieces that "reflect on stories I have heard from friends of mine who have been victims of violence… My art reflects on their stories as well as on stories you hear in the media. My pieces focus on the idea that women who have been victims of violence often feel invisible or that their stories are not known to the people close to them. Instead, they have this façade and, in my pieces, I work with this idea of the façade and the real faces."

The "Broken" pieces are mosaics but they are also trays. She described her work as sustainable and explained that she had gathered the mosaic pieces, with jagged edges and irregular shapes, after smashing several old tiles from her architecture firm. "The actual process of smashing the tiles was a release and it was me reliving what my friends are going through and expressing their anger through the process of breaking the tile pieces and then putting them back together. It was like the separation of their lives into all these pieces but then, how do they come back and create this whole person who has to sustain herself in front of everybody else?"

The mosaics appealed to me in a special way and connected to my thoughts on trauma and the possibility of wholeness. One of Jenine's broken mosaics sits across from my desk as I write, as a reminder of the significance of this project and the power of visual and artistic representations. Several other pieces, including a set of images of women's faces made from old fabric and a set

of miniature tiles in similar ways were ways for Jenine to consider the process of piecing together lives wrenched apart by experiences of trauma and violence.

On a black fabric background, a set of copper bowls, ranging in size, about twenty in total, are arranged roughly by size. Some are open towards the viewer while others are overturned. This could be a galaxy of copper stars, a set of play bowls for a child, or an attempt to collect rainwater for a garden. The canvas they are mounted on stands upright on an easel, so perhaps collecting water would not be possible.

This object, by Mawadda, is called "Noise." It was accompanied by a small slip of paper, which the viewer could take along, that read:

> "Noise" is a series of copper bowls made to symbolize the different processes one feels and experiences after being a victim of abuse. The different size bowls symbolize small flashbacks one gets in their daily lives, and the big bowls symbolize the agony of reliving the moment. The malleability in forming bowls in the series "Noise" literally mimics physically fighting back. The hammering noises in making the bowls symbolize the blocking of thought and the distractions that block reality.

She explained that she usually makes jewelry, but that she felt compelled to create a metal art object in order to respond to the theme of the exhibition. She spent a long time thinking about the possibilities of the metals she worked with and wrote notes and thoughts down for several weeks. She considered what different forms of violence and abuse might be like and decided that for her, at that point in her life, rape would be the worst thing that could happen. She thought about the "anger that would be building inside, the reliving of the moment, the fighting back, and the going back to everyday life, and the ways it would affect the person in the long term." She thought that it would change the person completely and shift their outlook on reality. She wanted to make a piece that required most of the senses, both in making it and in viewing/experiencing it. "After I finished the piece, I realized that it doesn't have to be about rape, it can be about other bad experiences, about violence, but also about a mean comment someone made when you were younger that you keep replaying in your mind. So it could be for anyone."

In describing the process of hammering the bowls she referred again to the noise that it made to do so. She also decided not to polish the copper in order to reflect on the connection of beauty and ugliness in the copper as a formable material and the process of giving it shape.

On a bright red background, lines of Arabic calligraphy form the shape of a woman's head in profile. The script is golden yellow.

This piece was created by Huda, and it represented the theme of the art exhibit in Arabic, rendered in beautiful calligraphy. Huda explained that she wanted to connect the face of a woman with the words that formed the theme, but she did not want to imprint the calligraphy onto the face as she has done with other paintings. Instead, the words form the face and head of the woman. She is seen in profile because the piece is not a critique, the woman pictured does and does not want to tell about her abuse, and so she is not facing the viewer. Her turned head also represents the shame associated with disclosing and discussing abuse in some Muslim cultures. The spacing between the lines and letters was an important point of the calligraphic process because even when women tell their stories, the stories contain the silence of things that are unspeakable. And women often are silenced into not speaking about their abuse. These silences are carved into their histories and into their memories, and eventually they shape who they are. The picture of the woman is intended to remind the viewer of an ID picture because eventually a victim of abuse can be reduced to that one identity.

Support

In a charcoal drawing, two hands are reaching towards each other. They do not quite touch but the effort to do so is obvious. One hand looks real while the other one is more of a shadow, perhaps from behind a screen?

Lamia's "Reaching Hand" begins to tell the story of how abuse victims try and find support and how they, at least sometimes, do not know how and do not know who to approach for help. It is a reminder that support is out there even when victims cannot always see it. Of course, finding support and navigating the complicated structures of the state, private agencies, and non-profit organizations can be extremely challenging for victims. Similarly, taking a first step to acknowledge abuse and the need for support can pose insurmountable hurdles for women. The hands in the drawing represent this struggle and reflect the complicated ways in which victims who need support do not always find it or even know that it exists.

Two rectangular pieces of pottery, glazed in warm shades of ochre, brown, and soft white, are arranged next to each other. They are shaped like bowls or trays, with the corners and edges curving upward. The ceiling lights are reflected in the luster of the glaze.

The placement of these two clay pieces by Jenine in this section on *Support* comes through their titles. They are called "Hold" and "Cradle." At first I thought of them as nouns but it makes more sense to me now to read hold and cradle as verbs. The pieces are meant to do something: to hold and to comfort like a cradle would an infant. Jenine also referred to the process of shaping, painting, and then glazing the pieces as reflective of the layers of women's lives. Several of

the artists saw their participation in the exhibition as an expression of support for victims and survivors of abuse, whether they were people they knew or the many unnamed and invisible victims and survivors that surround all of us. They also found support for this endeavor in each other.

In several interviews and conversations, artists described the initial reactions of family members and friends to their art pieces. Even when they first expressed shock or concern about the pieces and their impact as part of the exhibition, most eventually came around and supported the project. This validation and support for their art was important to them and they saw the closest circles of family and friends as both their first audience and as a support network. Similarly, artists described their emergence as artist, whether professional or as amateur artists, as a process of negotiating their need and drive to express themselves with the reactions of family and friends. Attitudes to "art-making," as we saw in the discussion of culture above, ranged from full support and the deep appreciation of art as a reflection of divine beauty in this world to some doubt and lack of understanding. Eventually, their artistic drive was recognized as a calling for many of them and family members, especially parents and siblings were described as expressing pride in their accomplishments. At the exhibit, it was clear that a number of artists had invited friends and family members to attend and they had done so in significant numbers, and as a show of support, for both the artists in their families and friends circles, and in support of the theme of the exhibit.

Support for the project also came from a number of organizations including the Peaceful Families Project, Project Sakinah, and Muslimaat al-Nisaa, the Muslim women's shelter in Baltimore. Mildred Muhammad, the author of *Scared Silent*, was there to sign and sell her book and to promote her organization, After the Trauma.[10] Several other organizations had sponsored information tables at the exhibit and showed their support through their presence there. They also provided information about DV and available services in the DC metropolitan area. Other sponsors included the Interfaith Community against Domestic Violence, Montgomery County in Maryland, a county that has been a leader in developing structures and services for DV victims.[11]

Brought together, these layers of encouragement and support helped make the fruition of the project possible and were meant to provide support to survivors and empower women who had experienced various forms of violence and abuse. The theme of the exhibition very intentionally included both empowerment and

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[10] See Hammer, *Peaceful Families*, p. 25-52.
[11] See Hammer, *Peaceful Families*, p. 152-187.

healing, because the artists and organizers wanted to do more than raise awareness of the issue – they were invested in both the possibility and the necessity for healing and for the empowerment of women.

Healing

Lines of handwriting, in English, that are almost but not quite legible are at the center of a large piece framed in black. The writing is partly obscured by ornate flowers and vines, in red, blue, and yellow, that grow out of the top left and bottom right corner of the page. There are red felt pieces, looking like clouds and flowers, and thick black threads of felt that somehow threateningly encroach upon the story. I want to read the lines, but the handwriting is not really legible. There is a story here, but it cannot be read easily.

The artwork is by Kamila, and she called it "Desert Story." It appears in the final section of the virtual exhibition on healing because the making of the piece, the process for her, was one of working through her own experiences and she described it as an important way to bring closure to a particular part of her life. She employed lines that looked like language, like writing, because she was interested in the idea of meaning and form, and she wanted the viewer to stay long enough to try and read what was written. This piece tells the story of her abusive marriage. The story begins with a road trip across the United States she took with a friend before she got married. Her marriage of ten years ended in 2010 and her friend called her up to ask whether she wanted to take another trip through the desert, and she did. The felt pieces on the artwork were made right after the first trip, and the dryness of the material reminded her of the desert. There were feelings of anger, of hurt, and of fire inside that reminded her both of the heat of the desert and especially the nature of the cactus plants she saw there.

Making the piece was her way of letting go, of working through the experiences of her marriage and divorce, and of finding the strength to move on. She presented the artwork as her closure and wanted to both help herself heal and show others that closure and healing are possible.

There are shapes and colors, pieces of newsprint, and the crumbled lines of the paper that the artist painted on. The shapes and colors, purple, red, yellow, blue, form the face and torso of a woman. She wears a headscarf, her eyes, nose, and neck are dark spots, and her expression is unreadable. Her posture looks a little bit stooped, and the feeling of the painting is strangely neutral.

This mixed-media painting, by Fatimah, made it into the *Healing* section of the exhibit because of its title. It is called "Confidence: Self-Portrait" and I read it as a reflection of the self-confidence the artist had gained through her work. It conveyed that such confidence was possible again, and that self-expression had allowed her to reach this point.

In what I thought of as a key exchange in a preparation meeting, two of the artists discussed the significance of art and art therapy for the process of healing and perhaps also empowerment.

This juxtaposition of the ugliness of violence and abuse and the beauty at the forefront of healing can be found in many examples of artworks produced by survivors of trauma and abuse. For example, in looking at art pieces displayed on the website of Vera House (a DV advocacy organization in New York), I noticed how the art pieces made by survivors can be divided into two categories: those that reflect on the abuse and its consequences on one side and those who represent things, colors, thoughts and feelings that are beautiful and intended to counter the ugliness of the abuse.[12]

The theme of healing was most compellingly brought out in the decision to invite Marta Sanchez to lead a workshop on the evening of the exhibit. Sanchez was born and raised in Panama and is a self-taught visual artist, poet, and an activist. In one statement, on the website of an advocacy organization where she was a featured artist, she stated: "When I speak, I speak for survivors of sexual violence. I do not represent them, because it is virtually impossible to represent a silent, isolated community that rarely makes its voice heard. I speak for them, so that they will know that the violence they experienced was not their fault, and so they will know that they are not alone."[13] In a small book with her writings and artwork, called *Beauty Unbalanced*, she writes: "Her paintings are autobiographical, capturing her journey from victim to survivor of sexual violence. Her creativity has been key to her survival. Through her artwork and writing she transforms each experience into something useful and positive. Her work focuses on hope, the importance of self-love, and the way we deal with (or ignore) sexual violence."[14]

At the exhibit, Marta, carrying her baby in a soft brown scarf, wrapped snugly around him, she started by asking everyone to stand, "because I am so excited that you are all here to take a stand, to take a stand against violence." She engaged the audience through an interactive poem in which she would read lines

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[12] See http://www.verahouse.org/domestic-violence-sexual-assault/survivors/survivors-art-poetry. Vera House is a DV advocacy and service organization in Central New York, created in 2005 through a merger of Vera House and the Rape Crisis Center. Vera House was founded in 1977 by Sister Mary Vera, a member of the Congregation of St. Joseph, a Catholic order of nuns.

[13] http://www.arte-sana.com/featured_artist.htm

[14] Marta Sanchez, *Beauty Unbalanced* (self-published, 2009). In my copy of the book, which I bought at the exhibit, she wrote: "To Juliane, may beauty and balance be with you, always."

and the audience had to respond, loudly and convincingly, "Stop." She said that if we all said it loud enough and with conviction it would carry through the universe and truly stop violence. She showed pieces of her artworks in a set of slides and spoke about her own life experience, her journey, and her pain, because she could only speak from that place of personal experience. Part of her journey was to love herself again, to paint and draw angels that guard every one of us, and to eventually find a partner and have a child with them.

We all spent some time writing messages to each other on pieces of paper, testimonies, notes of encouragement, of support, and of love for each other. She collected them and read several out loud. There was a genuine sense of community that permeated the room, a powerful connection and a kind of warmth, appreciation, and love that I would not have thought possible in a roomful of strangers.

I thought it was both meaningful and significant that the keynote speaker and workshop leader for the exhibition was a survivor of sexual violence. Throughout my research, I have recognized the boundaries that are sometimes drawn around different types of interpersonal violence and the deepest silence that surrounds issues of sexual violence, be it in marriage, against children, or against women. Marta's presence, her outspokenness about the nature of her trauma and the ways in which she connected sexual violence to other forms of oppression and trauma, brought back together the often-disparate strands of awareness work and activism.

For the many ways in which the artists and organizers navigated Muslim communities, DV organizations, and state institutions, and for the complicated ways in which feminist ideas and practices permeate work related to gender-based violence, it also mattered that Sanchez identifies as a feminist. In her essay, "The Feminist Evolution of an Artist, Survivor, Conjurer from the Tropics," she writes:

> I became a feminist at creation, not at birth, but between conception and light. Feminism named me, while my grandfather strung binding words together beneath a tree. My father nurtured me a feminist. I was a feminist when I was raped on my way to Paradise. I was a feminist when I worked at the Feminist Women's Health Center in Atlanta, shedding light on my own abortion experience. I was a feminist the day I became an artist, fell in love, and every day that activism guides me through this world.[15]

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[15] Marta Sanchez, in *Click: When We Knew We Were Feminists*, eds. J. Courtney Sullivan and Courtney E. Martin (Berkeley: Seal Press, 2010), 145-154.

Conclusion: On Impact and Reception

The three-hour art exhibit attracted a large crowd and was considered a big success by the organizers. Many lamented that the artworks could not stay on display longer and thus reach a larger audience. Representatives from Montgomery County, including Lily Qi, from the Office for Community Partnerships, and Council President Valerie Ervin, offered opening remarks and messages of support. Qi made explicit connections between the theme of violence in Muslim communities and the presence of the same or similar issues in other communities and societies.

Nadia said at the opening: "This is a very unprecedented art exhibit, not only for Muslim women artists but really in our community, to be speaking out about domestic violence and sexual abuse and other forms of abuse, against women and children that happen, shown through the medium of art." Artists, advocates, friends, family members and visitors, some Muslim, and many others not, mingled at the exhibit, discussed issues of violence with officials and artists and looked genuinely impressed and moved at many of the artworks.

In one of the planning meetings, the tension between self-expression and the urgency of awareness of violence on one hand, and the interest and needs of organizations in the artworks as means for visibility on the other, were discussed:

> Some people and organizations are interested in purchasing art pieces or the copyright so they can use them for their awareness work by making greeting cards and buttons. But they are selective; there was one that wouldn't put our link on their Facebook page because it showed Lamia's drawing and they found it disturbing. One thing about this art exhibit is that we are not afraid; we don't censor the reality, which is that there are all these issues, and we are not going to try and shun the discomfort of this, but we will see this through. Even on the day of the exhibit, there will be some controversial topics and pieces; we are not doing this to please a particular crowd. It's first of all for us, to have reflected on the theme and worked through it for ourselves. There may be opportunities to sell our work to groups that work specifically in domestic violence and to Muslim groups.

One of the artists had expressed similar concerns in an interview:

> It was a difficult idea to digest, to sit down and think: "What do I do that is not gory?" As artists, we do this as a passion and not only as a hobby, but sometimes it is nice to sell your work, too. A lot of these pieces were on sale and you are sitting there thinking: "What can I do that is not going to be gory but gets the message across and people would actually say, okay, I want to hang this in my living room?"

Between the advertising beforehand and the outreach work to garner support from Muslim communities and DV organizations, the exhibit attracted a

great deal of attention beyond its audience on that evening. Several of the art pieces, by Afia, Nadia, and Jenine, were displayed at a fundraising event for the Peaceful Families Project at George Mason University that same year. Other pieces were displayed at a mosque in Maryland and when I last inquired, other Muslim community centers had expressed interest. At one point there were discussions about creating a traveling exhibit, but this project never materialized. The creation of the art pieces, the process itself as art therapy, the building of a community through the organization as well as the exhibition as an event, all came together to form one of the most powerful and memorable moments in my research.

It had a similar or even deeper impact on the artists themselves. This impact is best represented by describing one last art piece and framing it, not with an explanation by the artist, but with a comment by one of the other women artists after the exhibit.

The left side of the painting is a woman in profile, her face outlined in black and white. Her black hair is flowing into the painting and from her open mouth, a thick chain emerges and then breaks in the center of the painting, with small pieces flying in all directions. The background of the painting, a dark red, increases the intensity of the painting.

It is called "My Voice" and was painted by Saadia. It reminded me very much of the Singaporean AWARE pictures, but the message was clearly very different. The chain that had been holding back the woman's voice was breaking and she was able to speak or scream, boldly and without fear. One of the artists remarked that it was a very powerful experience for her to be part of this group. She felt proud and important and a little bit like a star. She might even have spoken for the other artists involved in the exhibition project, so she will have the last word in this article:

> We made a point, we did! The point was that you have to face it: violence against women exists. Every day women get beaten up, get hurt, and you have to face it, maybe more for Muslim women because of the religion and the culture. We are done with that; we are so tired of it! Afia's photographs and especially Saadia's painting of the woman screaming, she is saying, for all of us, 'Enough!'

Domestic Violence: A Personal Reflection and Journey

Gameelah Mohamed

My story is not so different from many others – an arranged marriage at a young age (barely a teen). My account may echo or resonate with those who read it. I hope that telling it will help others heal or give hope to those still stuck in a cycle of violence.

In the Arab community, domestic violence is a taboo subject. I come from a Yemeni family, where this topic is hard to talk about in a formal circle. I was born and raised in the U.S. and was married at 15 years old, like many of my peers. Arranged marriages were the norm in my generation. We didn't get to finish school or choose whom we married but were deluded into believing that we did. Control was part of being Yemeni and, for some of us, so was domestic violence.

The abuse wasn't physical; that would come later. I educated myself about marriage in Islam and how we should practice it. I learned that both men and women were entitled to respect. But what I learned from my research differed from what my elders and culture had taught. It was completely different from what I had seen or experienced. For as long as I could remember, women not being allowed to seek an education or form opinions about minor things had been the norm in my culture.

I had never been able to accept that and told myself repeatedly that it had to be wrong.

I tried leaving my husband for various reasons, not just because he wanted complete control. I was unhappy with him and thus could not connect with him on any level. It also felt wrong to be with him. However, again, elders and family continued to say, "You think marriage is supposed to be happy. It's not, so stop complaining!" I went so far as to try and resolve the issue myself by confronting my husband and telling him I wanted a divorce. He threatened to kill me, which was the first time he had done this. I became afraid because I believed him. I told my family, but no one intervened. Instead, they thought it was a joke. I continued to search for a way out, but my husband only got angrier. I had gotten the courage to confront him because I had thought I'd be safe doing so while visiting my family. But it didn't make it safer. My faith and prayers are what got me through, for I knew deep down that God does not want His servants to be treated this way, and my research proved this. That revelation helped me continue to search for a way out.

Domestic violence manifests itself in a variety of ways and causes long-term trauma. My husband wanted to control me and mold me into what he wanted. When I felt the end was nowhere in sight, I slowly lost my voice and identity. I went from being outspoken and confident to being submissive and

fearful. Help wasn't coming, I'd tell myself. And yet, there was a tiny part of me that would say, "Maybe not right now, but it's coming." I carried that slight bit of hope with me throughout my hardships, the cheating behind my back, financial, emotional, and psychological abuse. Sadly, I began to hate who I was and neglect myself little by little. One of my tipping points was when he threatened to take my kids away while on a trip overseas. He even said he was unstoppable and I had no power. He would mock me for praying, for wanting to go to the mosque or congregate with Muslim sisters from different countries. He'd say, "They aren't real Muslims and will brainwash you." He'd play mind games and try to manipulate me, trick me, or task me with chores until my feet and back hurt. It did not matter if I was pregnant or postpartum; he did not respect my body or voice.

I began to feel numb and, often, worthless. I remember crying to my Creator and asking how men like this can treat women this way and claim to be Muslim? I called and pleaded my case to my Creator as I prepped Ramadan dinner over a gas range with tears running down my face. I felt my faith begin to weaken, and in that instant, I felt it strengthen as I felt a cold and soothing feeling on my back. A cool sensation brushed my right shoulder to the middle of my back and restored my faith. I had pleaded my case to God, and He responded. He reassured me that He had heard my cries and wanted me to know.

Many events pushed me to the brink of a nervous breakdown. However, I remained firm in my faith, knowing that a door would open someday and allow me the opportunity for escape because God had responded. The same night I cried to God, my husband's affair became known to the world and his reign of terror and lies were coming to light. It was as if that was God's way of reaffirming that He had heard my pleas. Because my faith had grown even more substantial, I knew never to doubt it again. I continued to believe that the day to escape would come. That day finally came, but in a way I never would have expected. I think about it even at this moment, and I feel my faith strengthen; God never forgot me because I never forgot Him.

The day of my escape began with my daily routine of sending my kids to school, preparing breakfast for my husband, and then leaving home to avoid being around him. I will never forget the feeling I got when I returned home to a couple of blacked-out SUVs and a police car on the side of our house. That day I learned that my husband was under federal investigation. The agents advised me to call someone to pick me up so I wouldn't be alone after seeing how distraught I was. They also didn't want to scare my son, who was on his way home from preschool. The agent in charge told me that my husband had been taken in for questioning. It was the scariest and most relieving feeling in the world. I felt a sense of relief through the shock and tears. I had another sensation of God telling me He had again heard my pleas. I immediately called a divorce lawyer because my instincts said, "It's now or never!" I was no longer afraid of my husband at that moment,

and I could hear God telling me, “You were afraid of him; now I have sent someone for him to fear. This is your chance to get away.” This new revelation would make it easier to fight for my freedom, and it did. During my marriage, my health had also become affected. Tension headaches, dizzy spells, and panic attacks were almost daily. Believe it or not, they disappeared the same day my chance for escape came.

In my times of hardship, the community turned its back. Family members and whomever I reached out to for help made me feel helpless or that this was normal. I was an advocate for any woman who needed it, no matter what I was going through. Unfortunately, not many returned the favor when I fought to get away. But I didn't expect anything less. I saw the struggles and challenges of my Muslim sisters and why leaving an abusive relationship is not easy. I know because I've been there.

Leaving can be dangerous, and I know this firsthand. Emotional and psychological abuse soon turned physical and even deadly when I refused to remain complicit in my abuse. I stood up for myself yet again, only to realize how careful I must be because I had no support from my community. I stood up to my abuser and found allies in unlikely places. I found support in my Muslim sisters from other countries — a neighbor friend, and even law enforcement. I was lucky enough to find a fantastic lawyer who helped me find the strength to fight back. I only found this attorney because of another attorney I knew through my networking. Yes, networking and building relationships and friendships with people outside your usual circle come in handy when you least expect it. Going to gatherings where influential people are can also be helpful. I received support from a mentor and female chaplain in the Muslim community. I wouldn't have met her if I had not gone to one of her seminars at a local library. Unfortunately, resources for Muslim women can be slim to none in many areas. One of the most important things I did before every major decision on my journey of escape was praying *istikhārah*.

Islam gives women a platform and a voice. We have incredible, courageous women in our history. I live my life every day reminding myself of that, and it gives me strength and hope.

Five years later, I continue fighting for my sisters and have become a voice and a guide for those who need it. Just like the Muslim mothers and sisters before me, I will continue to amplify the voices of the voiceless and advocate for women's education, empowerment, and independence. Islam teaches us to be the voice of reason, not the voice of destruction, to amplify our sisters' voices, and to provide education to them and the rest of the community. We must educate ourselves and those around us. We must put an end to the corruption and destruction of women’s rights.

If we seek advice from those around us who are part of the problem, we will never manage to eliminate domestic violence or any violence in Muslim communities. Sharing our stories and experiences sheds light on situations that others may be going through. Do not be ashamed to ask for help. Learn who to ask by building your network. Do not tell anyone your plans, not even your best friend. Keep money with a friend, a suitcase, and essential documents. I never told anyone my plans, especially when I got my restraining order. Women in my community were under their husbands' scrutiny about their involvement or knowledge of my goals. Luckily, I never trusted anyone but Allah, which not only worked for me in the end, but works for other women as well. It is sometimes a bad idea to seek help from people in our immediate circles, whether a mosque leader or person in the religious community, unless they have significant training in victim support. Elders are not the best at assisting either, for they have suffered their share of cultural norms and may not be the best ones to turn to for advice. Other women can be very judgmental as well. In my experience, women are always the first ones to betray you because they thought they were proving themselves to be loyal wives.

Furthermore, leaving is only the first step; many other actions must follow. It will appear impossible and frightening at first but will become easier with each step and will be worthwhile in the end. I do not regret any part of my decision, and that is because I asked for guidance from God with every step I took; all I had to do was listen. I recently graduated with honors from community college and received a prestigious scholarship to a university. Keep your faith and never give up because Allah does not give up on you.

Reflections

My Reflections on Spiritual Abuse

Rami Nsour

Recognizing, understanding, and responding appropriately to systems of oppression (*dhulm*) is a part of our *deen* (practice of Islam). One such system is spiritual or religious abuse, two terms I will define. Spiritual abuse is not specific to Islam or Muslims, for it can be found among members of any religious or spiritual tradition. My personal experience has been directly responding to spiritual abuse as it pertains to Muslims and studying how it fits within a Shariah framework. I will discuss some of this term's current uses, provide a Shariah-based working definition of this concept, and then present several areas where I have seen it appear as a pattern among Muslims in terms of parent-child, teacher-student, and spousal relationships.

This is neither an end-all nor an exhaustive analysis of the issue, but only an additional voice to it. Addressing this complex matter, or any abuse perpetrated using religion, requires a complex response. As there is no pre-existing template or ready-made book or chapter, the concerned members of our community must discuss and work toward practical solutions. As Muslims, we are obliged to develop our ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood and to stop the abuser from carrying out further abuse. Therefore, Muslim individuals and communities must formulate methods of prevention, intervention, and postvention.

Defining Terms

Defining terms has been an essential part of any scholarly Islamic discipline since the earliest days of Islam. Individual scholars or entire schools of thought define how they use terms (*istilah*) and exactly what they mean by them. The Shariah also takes into consideration the common or cultural uses (*'urf*) of languages, which can have a direct impact on rulings. Thus, we should view "spiritual abuse" from both the point of *istilah* as well as *'urf*.

Something as seemingly simple as the word "difference" (*khilaf*) has to be prefaced and qualified for it to be properly understood per the context of how the author uses it. The Turkish scholar and soldier Khalil ibn Ishaq (d. 767/1365) begins his text with specific definitions of *khilaf*, *taraddud* (wavering), *istihsan* (preference), and other terms to discuss varying opinions. For example, *sunnah* holds many meanings depending on which scholar, school of thought, or discipline one uses it in. Examples like *sunnah* or *khilaf* may be more agreeable to some as examples of technical vocabulary usage since they are within our

tradition. Over the centuries, other terms were borrowed from other traditions because they captured in a single word a well-accepted Islamic concept.

To many, *mutawatir* may seem to have always been part and parcel of Islamic scholarship. Dr. Suheil Ismail Laher, in his excellent PhD dissertation[1] on this concept, says, "Arab philosophers likely imported the tawātur concept from the Greek empiricists." In another example, many scholars used *al kimiya* (alchemy). Ghazali even used it in the title of one of his most famous books: *The Alchemy of Happiness* (*Kimiya e Sa'adat*). Scholars, recognizing the problems of using similar terms in different ways, focused on how to handle this problem.

One very old and well-known scholarly principle states: "There is no squabbling over terminology (*la mushahatta fil istilah*)." In short, if the term's meaning is not fully agreed upon, each party should explain how they define it and what they *mean* when they use it. If they agree on the definition but not on the terminology to use, their ensuing discussion(s) should focus on the meaning they are trying to convey. One of the first tasks of any debate is to define the relevant terms. Even debate clubs do this.

Some people will continue to argue over terminology (*mushatal istilah*), like those who argue that "Islamophobia" should not be used when referring to the systematic degradement of Islam. I will respond to those critics with the same words of Dr. Hatem Bazian, one of the world's leading experts on Islamophobia, when I asked him for his opinion. He said, "That train has left the station." I say to those who oppose the use of this term that while they continue to argue how many angels can fit on the head of a needle, the rest of us need to work toward preventing and treating the issues caused by spiritual abuse.

Another very important point to consider is the term common (*'urfi*) usage. Our *deen* (practice of Islam) requires that certain devotional (*ta'abuddi*) utterances must be done exactly as they have been narrated and transmitted to us, such as what to say in prayer and how to do *talbiyya* for hajj. Other things require only a correct intention (*niyyah*). If the Shariah does not define how the term is to be used and there is no specific intention, then we fall back to looking at it through the *'urf* of that particular area at that particular time. For example, the Malikis consider that a very specific wording must occur when conducting a marriage, whereas the Hanafis allow for the common usages. If we look at other elements of law, such as oaths (*yamin*), agency (*wakala*), bequests (*wasiyya*), and endowments (*awqaf*), we find that scholars refer to the term's common usage in the absence of a clear Shariah definition or stated intention. In such cases, we

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[1] Laher, S. I. (n.d.). Twisted threads: Genesis, development and application of the term and concept of Tawatur in Islamic thought (dissertation).

must ask: If a person sets up an endowment (*waqf*) or a bequest (*wasiya*) to research or help victims of spiritual abuse, who should receive those funds? If a person swears an oath (*yamin*) or makes a statement of divorce (*talaq*) and has that statement connected to "spiritual abuse," how would we formulate the relevant ruling (*hukm*)? Therefore, we must analyze how the term is being used in both common and specific technical language.

Defining Spiritual Abuse

Using the Ngram search function of Google, one finds uses of "religious abuse" and "spiritual abuse" as far back as the early 1800s. Spiritual abuse is sometimes used synonymously with religious abuse. One reason for the distinction is the modern usage of "spirituality" to refer to an individual's practice of connecting to something otherworldly, whereas "religion" refers to practice within the confines of a specific organized religion, as in the now common statement of "I am spiritual but not religious." In this article, I will consider both terms as one and the same in that they are part of one's *deen*.

In the United States, some of the earliest uses of "spiritual abuse" in print go back to the 1950s. A recent article in Web MD[2] defines this term as "any attempt to exert power and control over someone using religion, faith, or beliefs can be spiritual abuse" and that "spiritual abuse can happen within a religious organization or a personal relationship." The website Spiritual Abuse Resources[3] states that "some apply the term *spiritual abuse* to any kind of psychological, physical, or sexual abuse that takes place in a religious context," whereas "others apply the term specifically to manipulations that damage a person's relationship to God or to his/her core self." On the *In Shaykh's Clothing* website, Danish Qasim says that they specifically use it to refer to "the misuse of religious position.[4]"

Wright[5] (2001) says that, "Religious abuse is abuse administered under the guise of religion, including harassment or humiliation, which may result in psychological trauma. Religious abuse may also include misuse of religion for selfish, secular, or ideological ends such as the abuse of a clerical position."

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[2] Contributors, W. M. D. E. (n.d.). *Spiritual abuse: How to identify it and find help*. WebMD. Retrieved October 7, 2021, from https://www.webmd.com/mental-health/signs-spiritual-abuse.

[3] https://www.spiritualabuseresources.com/

[4] https://inshaykhsclothing.com/home/intro/defining-spiritual-abuse-how-and-why-we-use-the-term/#_ftn1

[5] Wright, Keith T. (2001). Religious Abuse: A Pastor Explores the Many Ways Religion Can Hurt As Well As Heal. Kelowna, B.C: Northstone Publishing.

Salma Abugideiri[6] says that "spiritual abuse is used to refer to a wide number of things," that "in a family context, we use the term spiritual abuse to refer to anything that interferes with someone's spirituality or religious practice," and that when it is perpetrated by a religious leader, it is abuse of the position of trust by transgressing boundaries against vulnerable people. Jeff VanVonderen,[7] one of this topic's most prolific writers, researchers, and speakers, says that,

> Spiritual abuse occurs when someone in a position of spiritual authority, the purpose of which is to 'come underneath' and serve, build, equip and make a deity's or a God's people MORE free, misuses that authority placing themselves over a God's people to control, coerce or manipulate them for seemingly godly purposes which are really their own.

From the above definitions, I posit three areas of potential abuse that directly correlate to principles in our *deen*: 1) misapplying one of its elements (*ghish*), 2) misusing a position of trust (*al aklu bil deen* or *khiyanatul amanah*), or 3) distorting the religion's principles or teachings (*talbis*). In all cases, the end result is taking the right (*haqq*) of another person, which is transgression (*baghy*). This framework provides a Shariah-based working definition of spiritual abuse.

Taking the Right of Another

Muhammad Mawlud, in his concise text *Mat-hartul Qulub* (*The Purifier of the Hearts*), says, "As for transgression (*baghy*), the author of *Fathul Haqq*[8] defines it as 'Harming another person without a right.'" In the commentary (*sharh*) on this line, Muhammad Al Hasan Ould Ahmad al Khadim says, "*Baghy* (transgression) is [synonymous] with *dhulm* (oppression) and *ta'ady* (trespassing)." I would like to focus the reader's attention on the definition of oppression or transgression as it relates to harming them (*idhayah*). In his *Prohibitions of the Tongue*, Mawlud lists over 70 such matters, one of which is "bothering/harm," and then says, "And the forms of that bothering are many." This indicates that the many forms of harm will vary from person to person. So, we have specific rights (*huquq*), some of which are well-defined, that must be protected. Others have to do with the person's emotions and what would bother or harm him or her.

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[6] Daigle, C. (2018, August 12). *Understanding spiritual abuse: An interview with Salma Abugideiri*. Ottawa Muslims, Islam in Ottawa, Muslims in Ottawa, Ottawa Prayer Times, Muslim Link Ottawa, Muslims in Gatineau, Islam in Gatineau, Muslim Link, Ottawa News, Ottawa Muslim Events, Muslim Businesses, Ottawa Halal Restaurants, Halal Restaurants in Ottawa, muslimlink, ottawa, news, events, halal. Retrieved October 7, 2021, from https://muslimlink.ca/stories/muslim-spiritual-abuse-salma-abugideiri.
[7] https://www.churchexiters.com/spiritual-abuse/
[8] Shaykh Muhamdhan Fal ibn Muttali

All Muslims agree that taking the right (*haqq*) of another person is transgression, oppression, and wrong. Some may reject the qualifier "spiritual" or "religious" being added to that and ask, "Why can't we just call it oppression or abuse?" I would respond by pointing out the following: First, qualifiers distinguish specific types of transgressions from a general transgression (e.g., child abuse or police brutality). Would the person who rejects "spiritual abuse" also reject "child abuse"? Second, I contend that we find such usages in our tradition.

Religious Harm (*Darar Deeni*)

When discussing the spiritual disease of cheating (*ghish*), Mawlud says, "Ghish is defined as concealing a religious harm (*darar deeni*) even from a *dhimmi*[9] or a *mu'ahad,*[10] while others define it as embellishing (*tazyin*) what is not the most beneficial thing."

It amazes me that a man in the Saharan desert, living long before European colonization, would use a term such as "religious harm" (*darar deeni*) long before anyone in the West was using the terms "religious abuse" or "spiritual abuse." Yet, some members of our communities still reject the concept of spiritual abuse because it is somehow a liberal, Western, feminist concept. But let's take a moment to reflect on this second definition of *ghish* and the subtlety our scholars are pointing us to: thinking about the best interest of someone else, that taking that away is a form of cheating (*ghish*), As our Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever cheats us is not from us."

I would also like to draw the reader's attention to the second definition, "glamorizing what is not the most beneficial thing," a clear articulation of the concept of "best interest." This also has a base within our Shariah, one that was developed independent of the West's use of that term. Later in this paper I will use an example of a teacher (*shaykh*) who proposed secret second marriages to his female students and was very clear in his attempt to embellish that which was not in their best interest (*maslahah*).

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[9] Non-Muslims living in a Muslim country.

[10] Non-Muslims living in a non-Muslim country that has a pact (*'ahd*) with the Muslims. In our day and age, almost every non-Muslim country has Muslim country embassies, along with their own embassies in Muslim countries and allows Muslims to live in them via visas, residencies, or citizenship, thereby making most, if not all, non-Muslims *mu'ahid*s.

Misusing a Position of Trust (*Khiyanatul Amanah*)

I began a serious study of Islam during my late teens in the Bay Area and then, at 18, travelled to Mauritania. The second book I studied with my teachers there was *The Mukhtasar of Akhdari* by the great Algerian scholar Imam Abdur Rahman al Akhdari (d. 983/1575).[11] Although this text primarily covers the Maliki school's legal rulings (*fiqh*), he begins with a general chapter that outlines some core Shariah concepts. Among the most fascinating ones was, "And [also from the prohibited matters] is devouring the wealth of others without them liking it, as well as devouring through intercession and debt."[12] Of the three concepts here, I would like to focus on the first and the third ones.

The first concept, that of devouring wealth without people liking it, is taken from "O you who have believed, do not consume one another's wealth through *falsehood*, but only [in lawful] business by *mutual consent*" (Quran 4:29). This includes theft, along with every kind of prohibited devouring of wealth. Additionally, the verse states that consuming wealth through business transactions is allowed only if it is done with mutual consent (*taradiyy*), or, as Imam al Akhdari says, not "without them liking it." I remember asking one of my teachers to provide an example, and he replied, "a person who pesters and pesters until you give him something."

In the third ruling, the author discusses "devouring through debt," after mentioning devouring through these, that two related rules come from the principal summarized by Abdul Wahid Ibn Ashir in a line of poetry and taught to me by Shaykh Tahir Ould Murabit al Hajj: "Debts, guarantorship (*daman*), and intercession are prohibited to be used for other than the sake of Allah."[13] So it makes sense that Imam al Akhdari mentions both debts and intercession. One cannot benefit materially from a debtor while the debt is still standing and would be considered a form of *riba*. We are encouraged to loan money, but not to benefit from the debt.

Another narration of this text has a *fatha* on the *daal*, making it "*deen*" instead of "*dayn*." Imam al Akhdari is saying that using religion (*deen*) to devour

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[11] I translated and recorded this text in 2004 to be taught in American prisons. This course would later culminate in the Tayba Foundation in 2008, which delivers Islamic education by correspondence to Muslims prisoners in the United States That translation is freely available on this site: http://malikifiqhqa.com/uncategorized/explanation-of-the-kitab-al-akhdari/

[12] وَأَكْلُ أَمْوَالِ النَّاسِ بِغَيْرِ طِيبِ النَّفْسِ وَالأَكْلُ بِالشَّفَاعَةِ أَوْ بِالدَّيْن

[13] القرض والضمان رفق الجاه ** تمنع أن ترى لغير الله

the people's wealth is also prohibited. With that, I was taught a concept that resonated with me because I knew it was true even before my formal study of the Shariah: That charlatans take advantage of the people's trust for their own benefit. This ruling not only applies to taking wealth from people, but also to benefitting from doing so in any way, such as through service or putting on a facade of religious adherence. Importantly, this ruling has nothing to do with being paid for teaching the Quran or leading prayers, but with presenting a religious image to derive benefit from or to misuse the standing that one gains through his or her position.

This began a series of long discussions with my teachers about how people use the *deen* to gain things. They encouraged me to read Ibn al Hajj's *Madkhal*, which discusses both rectifying our intentions so they align with the Sunnah and how to avoid innovation (*bid'ah*). Ibn al Hajj spends a copious amount of time discussing how scholars go astray, the signs and tricks, and how to avoid them and warn people. Understanding this subtleness of our beautiful *deen* enables us to develop complex thinking while trying to comprehend these principles. Al Barkawi says in his text on *usul al hadith*, "It is not permissible to teach the sinners who are seekers of knowledge who use their knowledge as a means towards evil [and sinning]." Commenting on this line, Yusuf Al Kharbuti says, "Likewise are the shaykhs (*mashayikh*) of our time, as they use their spiritual practices (*suluk*) as a tool to gain worldly things (*dunya*) and we seek refuge in Allah from the evil of ourselves."[14] I wonder if contemporary people who adamantly oppose efforts to hold Muslim leaders to account would call these scholars "imam hunters."

In the *Mat-hartul Qulub* (*Purifier of the Hearts*), Shaykh Muhammad Mawlud discussed various forms that religious showing off (*riyaa'*) can take. He says:

> *Riyaa'* is defined as performing an act for someone other than the Creator to seek a benefit or praise from the creation, or to avoid harm. The worst type of *riyaa'* is the one who uses religion as a means to a sin, like the person who exhibits religious caution (*wara'*) so that people put in his trust the wealth of orphans.

Those who use religion to gain positions of trust and to take advantage of others are guilty of one of the worst sins.

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[14] حاشية الشيخ يوسف الخربوتي على شرح أصول الحديث لداود القارصي على رسالة البركوي

Spiritual abuse occurs when any person uses the religion or a religious position of trust (*amanah*) to take that to which they have no right (*haqq*); to coerce someone into doing what is not in their best interest; to take advantage of; and to harass, bully, ridicule, criticize, or otherwise transgress the established boundaries (*hudud*) of Allah. This use of religion or religious position is one form of spiritual abuse. Another and even more serious form of spiritual abuse takes place when the person distorts the religion.

Talbis: Distorting the Religion's Principles or Teachings

To begin my discussion of distorting the *deen*, I turn to Shaykh Muhammad Mawlud's[15] *The Prohibition of the Tongue* (*Maharim al Lisaan*). The author begins by stating that he wrote it after noticing that many seekers of knowledge focused on deep studies of law (*fiqh*), including many laws that would never be practically implemented, while knowing little of the rules of speech. Moreover, this occurs on a daily basis. Unlike *The Purifier of the Hearts*, in which he listed the 32 diseases of the heart alphabetically, he seems to have no system when listing more than 70 prohibitions of the tongue. In fact, I often wondered why he started with the point that he did.

This first topic was "Referring positively to something the Shariah has deemed blameworthy and referring negatively to something the Shariah deemed praiseworthy," based on the concept of *talbis al haqq* (concealing the truth with falsehood) referred to in "Do not mix truth with falsehood or hide the truth knowingly" (2:42). A few of the many examples refer to dating as da'wah or the hijab as oppression. Such doublespeak in politics and media makes otherwise detestable things more palatable, such as calling indiscriminate murder "collateral damage" or an imperial invasion "spreading democracy."

I wondered why the author didn't start with some of the more apparent prohibitions of the tongue, like backbiting (*ghiba*) or carrying tales (*namima*). Then I understood; deception can undermine the Shariah in ways that sinning cannot. For example, people can deceive themselves and then deceive others, as is the case with backbiting (*ghiba*). When those who engage in it know it is wrong, there is a chance they will repent. Even if they do not, they will still know in their hearts that what they are doing is wrong. But when those who refer to it as being something good, they are less likely to repent because they do not see it as

[15] Shaykh Muhammad Mawlud's books are a central part of studying the Shariah in Mauritania's Mahdara system. There is much to be said about the uniqueness of how the author chooses and presents topics. More can be found on this topic in my introduction to the translation of his "The Rights of Parents" poem.

something wrong. I still remember when a person I had asked to stop speaking about another person told me, "This is not *ghiba*… this is scientific evaluation."

When the deception (*talbis*) reaches the level of using the *deen*, it becomes even more problematic. Calling *ghiba* by a religious name, like advice (*nasiha*) or a warning (*tahdhir*), causes the deception to rise to the level of religious deception. This type of deception, which is at the heart of *bid'ah*, is more dangerous than sinning without a form of deception. In the *Madkhal*, Ibn al Hajj mentions a statement by of one of the Salaf, "If you are told that a mountain has been removed, then believe it. But if you are told that an innovator (*bid'i*) has repented, then don't believe it." Ibn Al Jawzi's *Talbis Iblis*, an amazing exposition of the innovators' mindset, details all types of innovation that characterize each of Islam's 72 sects and then says that once a person knows each type, any future innovator is just one of those groups or an amalgamation of more than one of them.

A serious study of deception, especially religious deception, is a core part of our faith and a great protective factor against spiritual abuse. The Hadith of Jibril, which outlines four major areas of our *deen*, was in the format of a series of questions. The fourth question was about the End Times and its signs. When outlining Islam, many people only mention the first three. I believe the fourth question reminds us that we live in a real world, that believers are obliged to recognize the time in which they live, and that they are to prepare for the End Times and its biggest trial (*fitnah*): The False Messiah (*Al Masih Al Dajjal*).

The Dajjal is the epitome of deception. One could even translate his name as the Deceiving Christ or Messiah, for he builds his acceptance through an existing system of religion; people love and respect Jesus Christ ('Isa, *alayhi salam*) and are waiting for his return. He builds on that and, through deception, gains his position. He does not just tell people that he will rule and that they should follow but taps into their need to believe in a higher power and that it has representatives on earth. As a teenager, I loved learning about the Dajjal and the End Times. Based on all the youth groups I have led I know it is still one of the most popular topics. In fact, we are learning how to recognize imposters when we read those hadith, preparing for the nearly 30 lesser ones who will come before him, and preparing ourselves for any of the many micro imposters or even true Muslims who exhibit elements of deception (*dajal*).

I have often reflected on why we have been instructed to read *Sura al Kahf* every Friday as a protection against the Dajjal. I thought about how this being has a system of oppression and deception. Then in looking at some of this sura's themes, I noticed a pattern: It is an analysis of powerful systems in our world, namely, polytheistic governmental systems from which the young men fled and the righteous governmental system in which they awoke. Economic systems are discussed through the story of the two men and the garden, and an exposition of

systems of knowledge with Musa and Khidr (*alayhimus salam*). Dhul Qarnayn's story recounts a righteous leader's system overtaking unrighteous governmental systems. I even find an indication of considering the welfare system in the advice to not turn away from those who remember Allah, the Ahlul Suffa. We have to be aware of the times in which we live and the systems of those people who seek to deceive us.

And finally, we must recognize that some matters of our religion are clear cut and allow no interpretation (*ta'weel*). There are matters of which there can be varying interpretations as long as they are reasonable. If an unreasonable interpretation (*ta'wil ba'id*) gets stretched even further, it is referred to as a distortion (*tahrif*).

A family or a community who does not respond appropriately to a case of abuse (*baghy*) could be guilty of the sin of not stopping harm when they could have done so. There could also be one or more elements of spiritual abuse using the three Shariah concepts outlined earlier. The most common form used by the abuser's enablers is manipulating the *deen* (*talbis*).

Shutting Down Responses to Abuse

When victims of abuse try to bring up what was done to them or attempts to address such instances are brought up, many times they are shut down by others, especially those closest to the abuser. This applies in all domains – child, sexual, and workplace abuse, to name just a few. This is also the case with Muslims. This shutting down is most alarming when it comes from people who have actually studied Islam seriously. One common pattern here is using subjective ideas or objective rulings or principles, but in a very subjective manner.

This method of distorting and manipulating the *deen* is a common sign of the End Times, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "Every person who can hold an opinion will be impressed by their opinion." To counter this type of cognitive distortion, Muslims need to devise a check and balance system by looking critically within our tradition and talking with those who have extensive relevant experience, both through study and experience, to formulate an appropriate and realistic response. Examples are claiming that reporting abuse is "bad *adab*," holding negative opinions (*su'ul dhann*), exposing sins, or that the "proper Islamic process" is not being followed. In each of these cases, the abuser's protectors cannot provide objective terms and applications of the principles they are citing.

In the case of the citing bad "*adab*" (proper etiquette), most often the people are presenting their own opinions, feelings, emotions, or sentiments as very objective definitions of "proper Islamic *adab*." This is now commonly referred to those working in the field as "playing the *adab* card."

Another common example is that reporting and/or addressing abuse is "exposing sins." While they are correct that part of our religion dictates that sins

should not be exposed, there are very specific rules as to when, where, and what should be exposed. These very objective guidelines are detailed by the scholars (*'ulema*) of the Shariah who examined the instances when the Prophet ﷺ allowed people's sins to be discussed in their presence. Detailing such discussions is beyond the scope of this paper but suffice it to say that if you ask the average person who uses this "card" to define the terms and boundaries, he or she will most likely be unable to do so. In his commentary on Mawlud's *The Prohibitions of the Tongue*, Muhammad al Hasan, says:

> Ibn Ḥamdūn mentions that Ibn ʿArafa, in the *Takmīl*, states that "A person who is involved in courts (*qadaa'*) or counsel (*shuraa'*) related to Sharīʿa affairs should listen to what is said about a person or people who are followed. This is done with the intention of implementing the rules of justness and defamation, not with the intention of enjoyment. This is not considered to be backbiting and avoiding it would cause a breakdown in judgments or giving positions to those who are not deserving of them. If this was not the case, it would have not been possible to establish the defamation of a narrator, witness or other." This is supported by the ḥadīth that states that the Prophet ﷺ would ask others about what is going on with certain people and that he ordered people to be given their due positions.

A third concept that is frequently misapplied by such people is holding a negative opinion or not giving the benefit of the doubt (*su'ul dhan*). While we definitely find these concepts in the Quran and Sunnah, which attests to their objectivity, many people will use this term subjectively and cannot even define the objective boundaries of its meaning, not to mention its proper understanding and the permitted exceptions. Most people using the suspicion card will make it seem as if all suspicion is forbidden, despite, "Avoid *most* suspicion, for verily *some* suspicion is sin" (49:12). Clearly, there are exceptions to this general principle, for Allah said "most" (not all) and "some" (not all). Mawlud, in his *Purifier of the Hearts*, outlines this by saying, "Some suspicion (*dhann*) is not permissible, such as holding a negative opinion about someone who outwardly appears righteous. There is no sin in doubt (*shakk*) nor that which is based upon some proof, as that is substantiated." The scholars of *usul* distinguish between *dhann* and *shakk*, with *shakk* being 50/50 doubt that has no proof or reason for the doubt, while *dhann* is more than 50% and has a proof. Based on this, we see a clear definition of forbidden *dhann*: unsubstantiated suspicion (*mujarrad*) that is beyond doubt (*shakk*). This is why Imam Ghazali said in his *Ihyaa'*, "Whatever you do not see with your eyes or hear with your ears, and yet something comes into your heart, then know that it is from Shaytan and that you are obligated to disbelieve it."

Most people who present the principle of holding a good opinion (*husnul dhann*) fail to present the exceptions to that principle or provide a clear definition

of the term to begin with. They will not mention that scholars have narrated many statements about being careful by being suspicious, some of which have been recorded from the Sahaba and the Tabi'een, such as, "Whoever thinks good a lot about people will have a lot of regret," "Safety is in suspicion (*su'ul dhann*)," and "Beware of people by having suspicion." Al-Ajlouni dedicated an entire work to balancing the concept of negative suspicion with that of giving the benefit of the doubt (*husnul dhann*). Ahmad Zarruq said, "Do not entrust anyone with your family, wealth or religion (*deen*) unless you have tried them one million times."

There are many more examples of how people avoid properly dealing with instances of abuse and not holding abusers accountable. People may say things like "That's his/her personal life," "I do not condone or condemn what occurred," "He speaks the truth and is important for calling to Islam (*da'wah*)," "This will make Islam/Muslims look bad," along with a myriad of other foolish responses. We could dissect each of these individually and see what is behind them and at their root. I will end with two very common and related methods. Detractors will say, "You are making a big deal about it" or something similar, thereby belittling the abuse/oppression and pivoting any criticism to the person bringing the issue to light. In short, they make the issue about how someone is bringing it up.

The "Proper" Process to Respond to Spiritual Abuse

Another common response is, "You are not going through the right [or *Islamic*] process." This response makes many assumptions, including the apparent default response that the "Islamic" process is to not address the issue, that the person doing so is at fault, and that there is a well-defined, neatly packaged, pre-templated method to address such issues. The reality is that no specific chapter or section of any *fiqh* book deals with this specific instance, as proven by the fact that those who use the "proper Islamic method" card cannot explain exactly what that method is. They also ignore that part of the Islamic tradition of knowledge consists of scouring the available texts and compiling relevant sources to address the issues of their times. Mawlud states that the scholars of every age must undertake this process of compilation (*tadwin*). In his commentary on that point, Muhammad al Hasan says that Zarruq's authorship of the *Nasiha* was an example of fulfilling this obligation.

Modern examples are plenty, among them bioethics and all contemporary fatwas related to the advances of modern medicine. Many efforts have been made to scour the traditional sources to find an appropriate response from within our tradition. In a similar fashion, addressing all forms spiritual abuse must be undertaken to devise a practical and realistic framework and methodology.

Another core issue is that those who are calling for the "Islamic" response have very little or no training in the Shariah, as they make blatant mistakes or erroneous claims, or, if they have training, do not know the proper application.

This latter ability is a skill in and of itself, one that is developed through a series of practice and feedback from both experts and peers. I strongly believe that most Islamic seminary systems have a great deal to learn from the modern medical field in terms of systemized practices, internships, and residencies. Our tradition contains many examples of how our scholars learned from non-scholars who had more experience in the practical application of the Shariah. Ibn Al Jawzi related a story of Abu Hanifa being corrected by a barber who was an expert in the rules and etiquette related to cutting hair on the hajj due to his extensive experience in the field. I heard of a Mauritanian scholar who, upon entering the masjid in Mecca, was about to begin praying the greeting prayer (*tahiyyatul masjid*) when a local man passed by and said, "O shaykh, the *tahiyya* of the masjid of Mecca is *tawaf*." The scholar was reminded of this rule, which he had memorized, studied and taught. I experienced this when I pointed out to some 'ulema in Mauritania their misunderstanding of a particular ruling on wiping over leather socks (*khuff*) because they never had worn or wiped over them; however, they had studied and taught the rulings from the books.

This does not detract from our great scholars, for "one may find in the river what is not found in the ocean" as the Arabic[16] saying goes. It also reminds us that a rule's proper application depends on a proper conceptualization of the matter being ruled upon (*al hukmu 'ala shay' far tasawwurihi*). As Muslims, we must be both savvy consumers of products and media and of Islamic rulings (fatwas).

A Case Study of Deception (*Talbis*) by Abuser Enablers

In this regard, I cite the 2014 case of Abdullah Saleem,[17] a case of a very accomplished Muslim scholar who used his position in the community to abuse and take advantage of people under his care. We do not know how many instances of abuse occurred, because not everyone reported what had happened. In one instance, when a minor reported a sexual assault to a female schoolteacher (who is by law a mandated reporter), she said, "Saleem is an old man and old people do things like that, so just forget about it." In short, she minimized the abuse and made the issue about the person reporting it.

Not included in the online reports is that Saleem took female minors into a closed room and rubbed their naked bodies to "extract" jinn. One victim reached out to an email list of "ulema," who would have been graduates of the Dars-E-

[16] The Arabic is: يوجد في الأنهار ما لا يوجد في البحار

[17] See https://www.facetogether.org/us-and-canada/mohammad-saleem

Nizami six-year Alim curriculum, which contains a fair amount of legal thought (*usul al fiqh*) and laws (*fiqh*). Some of the ulema said it was wrong, and others sought to justify this type of *ruqya* on the grounds that the person was a shaykh and had the ability to do this.

What those ulema ignored was that even a doctor who is allowed to remove a patient's clothing is not allowed to be in seclusion (*khalwa*) with him or her. A close male relative (*mahram*) or enough medical staff must be present to prevent such seclusion. Secondly, the doctor is only allowed to do treatments that are time tested (*mujarrab*). Thirdly, parents who entrust a minor to a boarding school with a teacher have only given him or her a limited entrustment (*wakala*). Therefore, any procedure must have parental permission (*idhnul wali*). Fourthly, and the most glaring contradiction, is that all treatments must be in line with the Shariah and any use of something non-permissible must be scrutinized according to an even higher amount of testing (*tajriba*), peer review, and check and balance before being utilized.

Imagine the feelings of a 16-year-old girl who was courageous enough to bring up what a trusted person had done to her only to be shut down by some of those who used religious terms like "shaykh" and "*ruqya*" to justify this horrendous sexual assault. Some on the list did push back and gave the proper response; however, the fact that the others responded as they did shows that there is no clear-cut definition of what the "Islamic" approach is. Would we expect those ulema on the list to have a sophisticated response to a matter of bioethics from a few years of Shariah study, or only after they have been trained in that specific area and had their opinions peer-reviewed?

Another example from this community points out a glaring lack of knowledge of a ruling's application as well as of the specific ruling itself. This reality becomes even more shocking when the reaction comes from some imams, seekers of knowledge (*tullab al 'ilm*) and "ulema." One of these victims as a woman in her early 20s at the time. Saleem has signed a confession of what he had done to her. When people began discussing the matter, some said it should not be discussed because it falls into the category of *qadhf*, someone makes an accusation of prohibited sexual intercourse (*zina*). The problem is that *qadhf* refers only to the major form of *zina*, namely, sexual penetration, not to cases like kissing or fondling. The fact that people who are representative of the Shariah (e.g., students, teachers, imams, *shuyukh*, *ustadh*s or ulema) would attempt to shut down this young sister by using the *qadhf* ruling both distorts and manipulates the *deen*. In other words, this very action is in and of itself a case of spiritual abuse, as is the case of Saleem who exploited his religious position and the community's trust to oppress young women.

Spiritual Abuse Types

Spiritual abuse takes many forms. I will briefly look at three of them: 1) parents with their children, 2) spouses with each other, and 3) teachers/leaders with their students/congregants. Parents who abuse their children and use *deen*-related ideas to do so or prevent any opposition are guilty of spiritual abuse, as are spouses who use the *deen* to cloak (*talbis*) their oppression. This is also true of leaders who use it to take that to which they have no right, to goad a person into doing what is not in his or her best interest, and when extremist groups manipulate young people to commit an atrocity. In all of these examples, they are taking the right (*haqq*) of another person and, by not doing what's in that person's best interest (*ghish*); they are transgressing (*baghy*) the boundaries (*hudud*) of Allah and manipulating (*talbis*) the *deen*'s concepts to further their efforts to gain more power, wealth, control, obedience, and so on.

Parents as Spiritual Abusers

One sign of the End Times is that the disrespect of parents (*'uquq*) will increase. Many people, especially those in positions of community leadership, can attest to this. In my experience, such children have rarely, if ever, justified their sin with religious explanations (*ta'weel*). On the other hand, in almost every case I am aware of where it was the parent abusing the child, there has almost always been an element of distorting and manipulating the *deen*. And just like most community leaders have seen their fair share of religious counseling and are aware of these issues, I have also had an opportunity to see this firsthand. I translated and have taught Mawlud's *Rights of Parents* both in person and online to thousands of students.

While the book has had an amazing impact on most of those who have studied it and drastically improved the children's relationship with their parents (from as young as 6 to as old as 60), the main question I receive after teaching it is a very sobering one: How can I respect my parents (*birr al walidayn*) when they have abused me? In all these cases, some of which are very sad to recollect even now, the dynamics of misusing the *deen* are clear. The parent almost always justifies his or her actions through it, and the child accepts the abuse, even into adulthood. The children (when I say "children" I am talking about adult children as well) who are more attached to the *deen* are more at risk, because they view it as very special and sacred. So, when a parent "plays that card," it immediately resonates with the children. Doing so is a clear form of spiritual abuse according to how the term should be used.

Among the many forms of spiritual abuse is the following: Parents who harm (does *baghy* to) their child and then insist that the child visit them in person because they are entitled to such a visit. In reality, they are manipulating the *deen* to further this *baghy*. Parents who have unreasonable expectations of what their

children must do to please them and then claim they will hold back their acceptance (*rida*) of them if these expectations are not met are also guilty of spiritual abuse. These are just a few of the many examples I have seen play out in the lives of people who have sought my counsel.

For these children, I recommend learning how to deal with toxic parents, toxic relationships, narcissistic parents, and how to draw healthy boundaries.[18] Part of my approach is to explain to them that it is okay to keep their distance in whatever manner is in their own best interest. For so many people, my telling them that they are not disobedient children because they want less contact is liberating. Some of them have maintained a connection, even if it is toxic, harmful, and/or full of aggression, only because they fear being disrespectful, a fear that is almost always confirmed by the abusing parent. I also recommend that anyone who has a close relationship with a religious leader become familiar with the signs of narcissism, as such a relationship has the potential to become toxic and abusive.

Spiritual Abuse of a Spouse

One who attempts to take another person's right and distorts the *deen* (*talbis/tahrif*) or misapplies the principle is also guilty of spiritual abuse. As this topic is so vast, I will provide only a few examples.

In one instance, a woman who was being physically abused by her husband contacted the local imam. His only advice was to relate the hadith about the angels cursing a woman who is not intimate with her husband. This hadith, although sound in narration and having specific rulings attached to it, was inappropriate, a misapplication of what should have been said and advised. His response can be seen as a form of spiritual abuse, for it enabled the abuse to continue.

I have been consulted in a number of situations where the relationship between the wife and her mother-in-law is very toxic. Rather than working toward a solution, the husband and his parents misapplied the principle of respecting parents (*birr al walidayn*) and allowed the continued taking of the wife's rights (*huquq*). Both this and the preceding example illustrate Ali's (may Allah be pleased with him) statement: "A true statement that is used to attain falsehood (*batil*)."

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[18] In this regard, I recommend *Toxic Parents: Overcoming Their Hurtful Legacy and Reclaiming Your Life* by Susan Forward & Craig Buck, as well as *The Wizard of Oz and Other Narcissists: Coping with the One-Way Relationship in Work, Love, and Family* by Eleanor D. Payson LMSW.

Centralized Leadership

Spiritual abuse can thrive in an unhealthy environment of paying extreme deference to a single leader, whether the term used is shaykh (masc. form), *shaykhah* (fem. form), *ustadh*, *ustadha*, imam, *amir*, *khalifa*, *wali*, *salih*, *pir*, *mullah*, and similar ones. All such titles denote his or her position as a caretaker (*raa'*) or "shepherd," and everyone will be asked about those in their care. Learning from and being led by others is a part of our *deen*. But this system can be exploited in the absence of an active system of checks and balances that enables people to question or push back when something seems odd.

If we look at "If it were not for the pushing back of Allah using some people over others, there would have been corruption on Earth" (2:2521), we can see that people pushing back manifests Allah's order on Earth. Those who suppress this practice, such as authoritarian and cult leaders, as well as narcissists, are sowing corruption.

One of Islam's defining qualities is that it teaches one to think deeply and critically. An examination of the *seerah* literature reveals many examples of the Sahaba or later generations seeking clarification, especially when things did not make sense to them. The Prophet nurtured this practice, such as discussing where to camp at Badr, praying *'asr* in Bani Quraydha, and the Companion who refused to obey his *amir*'s order to jump into the campfire.

Developing the ability to distinguish between truth and falsehood is more than just being able to identify the immediately apparent, for that type of thinking can only see situations in black and white. This is called criminal and/or extremist thinking or generalized as cognitive distortions. Distinguishing truth from falsehood requires sophisticated thought. Suleiman tested Bilqees with the changes to her throne[19] after being told that she was feeble minded. Some scholars said this change was minor and a greater test to see if she noticed such subtlety.

One common point for such oppressors is that they oppose critical thinking by positioning themselves as the only ones who can make sense of the world, decide what their followers should do, and what is right. This type of centralized leadership and thought, when it goes to an extreme, can have very harmful repercussions. An extensive study conducted in Singapore of Muslims imprisoned for terrorist activities revealed that a key method in the path to extremism was the distortion *(talbis/tahrif)* of eight concepts. This same type of distortion occurs in those suicide cults that cause members to see self-sacrifice as the only way to freedom. On a much lower level of impact, this same type of

[19] Quran 27:41

control and distortion can happen in the shaykh-student relationship, especially given certain traditions about what that relationship is supposed to look like.

Premarital Education: Primary Prevention for Domestic Violence

Aneesah Nadir, M.S.W., Ph.D.

Abstract

While the reality of domestic violence in the Muslim community has been challenging to acknowledge, the reality that it exists has been increasingly accepted. Over the past twenty years recognition has increased, and the numbers of Muslim mental health and human service professionals focused on addressing violence among Muslims has increased. This has led to education, and increased awareness of the need for comprehensive culturally sensitive services to prevent and intervene in this public health issue. Premarital education and marriage preparation are among the ways to prevent domestic violence.

A State of Denial

Over the past two or more decades, there has been an increasing recognition that domestic violence is real and does exist in the Muslim community. When I began this work in the 1990s, our community was in a state of denial. As a prevention-focused marriage and family education social worker, and as someone who had witnessed domestic violence between my parents, I knew this was a real issue that had no religious or cultural boundaries. But most Muslims did not believe it existed among their co-religionists in America. Members of this diverse community, both converts and those raised in the U.S., were not unaware of this reality. Many of our immigrant brothers and sisters thought they had left that practice back home and did not expect to encounter it here. Many of us expected Islam to be a cure-all for the still nascent religious community that had not yet owned this reality. Neither group wanted to admit its existence, for Muslims were dealing with enough stereotypes and Islamophobia and wanted no more labels put on our community. In short, it was better to deny it.

Thankfully, Sharifa Alkhateeb, a pioneer in the field of domestic violence education, pressed on to raise awareness. She conducted surveys that made it impossible for community leaders to continue their ostrich-like "head in the sand" approach to domestic abuse. In 1993, she conducted the first documented survey designed to assess the incidence of domestic violence among Muslim leaders in the U.S. (Alkhateeb 1999). In a groundbreaking survey of 63 Muslim leaders and community members, at least 10 percent of participants reported having experienced physical abuse (Alkhateeb 1999). In another survey of 500 Arab women living in the Dearborn, MI, area, 98 percent of whom were Muslim, 18 to 20 percent of them had experienced spousal abuse (Abugideiri 2010).

These surveys began to open our eyes and suggested that our community suffers from domestic violence at least at the same rate as does the general American population.

After witnessing challenges experienced by couples who were my clients and community members, I wrote a chapter in *Islam in America: Images and Challenges* (Lin 1998) in which I identified domestic violence as a serious problem facing Muslim couples and families. I began to explore ways to prevent it and conduct early interventions. Something needed to be done on a macro community-wide basis.

Shahina Siddiqui, Belquis Altareb, Maryam Funches and I met to discuss our concerns about the lack of focus on mental health and social services needs of Muslim communities. A conference was organized in Herndon, Virginia to discuss our concerns and develop strategies. Approximately 100 committed sisters and brothers attending the conference supported and confirmed the need for an organized effort, which led to the establishment of the Islamic Social Services Association, Inc. (ISSA). ISSA's purpose was to raise awareness about the needs, as well as to educate and advocate for the social service and mental health concerns of Muslims in North America. One concern was domestic violence. Human service professionals knew that imams spent a considerable amount of time addressing marital problems, and that working together might lead them to see professionals as allies and partners. ISSA and the Muslim human service professionals had a vision that included healthy relationships, as well as healthy marriages and families that fostered healthy communities.

In 2000, Sharifa Al Khateeb founded the Peaceful Families Project (PFP), a leader in providing Islamically based programs and resources about domestic violence in our communities. Over the years, ISSA and PFP collaborated to provide domestic violence education for imams and community leaders, as well as DV 101 seminars for community members. One challenge was getting imams on board and vocal about violence against women and intimate partner violence. Imam Mohamed Magid, executive imam of the All Dulles Area Muslim Society (ADAMS) Center in Sterling, VA, was one of the earliest and most vocal supporters.

Then in February 2009, the horrific murder and beheading of Aasiya Zubair, the founder of Bridges TV, the first American Muslim English-language television network, by her husband "sent a shockwave through our collective consciousness. She was the very public face to a very private reality of abuse in the Muslim American community" (Project Sakinah, n.d.). If we did not believe that DV existed within our community before, now we could no longer deny it. The veil had been lifted.

Aasiya's murder led Dar al-Islam to begin Project Sakinah, a campaign led by Zerqa Abid of Ohio, to rally a host of collaborators who would raise awareness about this issue:

> In 2011 Peaceful Families Project & Project Sakinah conducted a survey, which indicated that 31% of American Muslims reported experiencing

> abuse within an intimate partner relationship, and 53% reported experiencing some form of domestic violence by a family member during their lifetime. The abuse may have included emotional, verbal, financial, physical or sexual abuse. (Celik and Sabri, n.d.)

Promoting Healthy Marriages

ISSA continued its community-based domestic violence prevention education and awareness campaigns while promoting healthy marriages through its Sakinah Healthy Marriage Initiative (SHMI). SHMI's vision includes a community of healthy, caring, vibrant, and peaceful marriages and families founded on sound Islamic values and principles. The National Muslim Marriage Week, an outgrowth of SHMI, was launched via a nationwide event that is held during the first week of Ramadan each year. This effort brings attention to the marital life of Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon him, and reminds community members to utilize this month to reestablish their relationship with Allah through the Quran and renew their relationship with their spouse and family. Community members are encouraged to use its 29-30 days to practice and strengthen the new relationship habits they commit to during this special week-long period in Ramadan's first week. This campaign has been effective in raising awareness in Phoenix and Detroit, which have served as pilots for the campaign in the hope that it will expand nationally.

In 2008-10, in collaboration with the Muslim Alliance in North America (MANA), ISSA's Sakinah Healthy Marriage Initiative promoted the signing of the Healthy Marriage Community Covenant (HMCC) by imams in Michigan. Among other items, it called for establishing a zero-tolerance policy for domestic violence in mosque communities and taking steps to ensure adherence, such as requiring couples to attend three to six premarital sessions, acquire a premarital education, and be referred to such local community or mosque-based programs.

Approximately fifteen imams and community leaders supported the Healthy Marriage Community Covenant. However, there were challenges, including the lack of professionals and imams qualified to provide premarital education, as well as funding to support the hiring of professionally trained instructors. Because prevention and early intervention services, as well as social and mental health services, were not considered of value, the focus was on convincing the Muslim community that they should be recognized and valued.

Domestic Violence Prevention

To understand domestic violence prevention, we need to understand prevention. The literature describes three categories of prevention: primary, secondary, and tertiary (Wolfe and Jaffe 1999) and considers primary prevention, early intervention, and treatment. Primary prevention focuses on addressing a problem

before it happens. For example, lock your car, lock your house, and set the alarm system before someone attempts to steal it or break in. Engage in good nutrition, water intake, sleep, and exercise before you get sick. Domestic violence prevention seeks to thwart the outbreak of any type of domestic violence or intimate partner violence. Secondary prevention's goal is to decrease a problem's frequency by minimizing or reducing its severity and the continuation of its early signs. At this level, prevention is about recognizing the first signs early on, the risk of additional abuse, and taking immediate action to avert any further abuse. Secondary prevention is also considered early intervention after the first sign or in the problem's early phase. Tertiary prevention efforts address chronic domestic violence. By this stage, the perpetrators may be incarcerated. We are much more familiar with the level at which the survivors and perpetrators begin therapeutic treatment. As a society and a community, we tend to focus on fixing rather than stopping problems before they occur (Nadir 2021).

While a multipronged approach is needed to address domestic violence, I advocate for primary prevention and early intervention. I am committed to preparing teenagers and young adults before they start considering marriage and who are engaged or in a relationship.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), early intervention is the key to survivors and perpetrators avoiding future involvement in violent relationships (Centers for Disease Control 2021). The CDC's website highlights strategies and approaches for blocking intimate partner violence. Wolfe and Jaffe (1999) share a Public Health Model for Domestic Violence Prevention from primary to secondary to tertiary prevention.

Premarital Education and Domestic Violence Prevention

As I continued to collaborate with my colleagues in the field to promote awareness and advocate for survivors, I held firm to my belief that we needed to lean into prevention and early intervention efforts. I argued that community members spent more time planning their wedding than preparing for a lifelong healthy marriage. I contended that if they knew more about marriage, marriage according to the Quran and the Prophet's traditions, how to cultivate a healthy relationship, and how to select a compatible spouse via a vetting process, they would have a better chance of not marrying an abusive person, or at least of recognizing red flags early in the relationship. Marriage preparation and premarital education courses are an important forum for conveying such information.

The Premarital Relationship Enhancement and Prevention (PREP), the Prepare and Enrich, the FOCCUS Pre-marriage Inventory, as well as other faith-based and mainstream programs, provide important marriage preparation and relationship skill-building learning opportunities. Throughout the 1990s in North

America, it was difficult to find Islamically based marriage preparation courses. Many of these offerings came out of the Christian community, which referred couples to their churches' primary providers: the clergy and pastoral counselors. But only a small percentage of couples sought formal marriage preparation (Silliman and Schumm 2000). Muslims who saw the need for such education began adapting some of these programs for their community. Some were supplemented with religiously based study sessions on marriage, among them the Marriage Preparation Course (Siddiqui 1996) and Are You Sure You're Ready for Marriage? (Nadir and Ahmed 1996), which led to the Marriage the Islamic Way: A Comprehensive Marriage Preparation and Education Program (Nadir 1997). These courses are considered among the predecessors to Dr. Aneesah Nadir's Before the Nikah Marriage Preparation course, which is currently provided via Zoom. Students from the U.S., Canada, the U.K. and Bangladesh have attended via the Zoom platform.

Developed specifically to provide marriage preparation, this course integrates lessons from the Quran and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad with practical relationship-building skills and is designed for Muslims as young as 16 years old (with parental permission). Unlike other such courses, Before the Nikah is geared for single, never-married young adult Muslims; however, newlyweds, divorced, and remarried Muslims are also encouraged to enroll. The focus remains primary prevention – obtaining knowledge and information before considering marriage and meeting a prospective spouse.

Do Marriage Preparation Courses Prevent Domestic Violence?

Strategies to address domestic violence vary with the causes and severity of the abuse. Unfortunately, there is no unanimous agreement on what causes it. Wolfe and Jaffe (1999) outline five theories: biological, individual psychopathology, couple and family interactions, social learning and development theory, and societal structure theories. Domestic violence can be explained by genetics, biochemistry, and changes in the brain's development due to trauma, and is also based on individual psychopathology or dysfunctional personality structures. Men who witnessed domestic violence or were victims of abuse during their youth could not develop healthy relationships. In this perspective, men who battered were shown to have mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, mania, psychosis, and criminality indicators. Faulty couple and family interaction that lead to poor family dynamics, as well as the underlying power imbalance in society and systemic gender discrimination, are also causes of domestic violence (Wolfe and Jaffe 1999).

Ongoing microaggressions and the trauma of systemic racism and anti-black violence outside the home also contribute to domestic violence at home. According to the Institute of Domestic Violence in the African American

Community, black women are three times more likely to die because of intimate partner violence than white women (Thomas 2015, 2). In addition to institutional racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia compound the many challenges new immigrant and refugee families face. Unjust immigration policies, a complex and difficult to navigate immigration system that does not easily accommodate language and cultural differences, as well as the lack of legal access exacerbate the difficult position new immigrants find themselves in. Domestic violence survivors also face threats that they will be deported or separated from their children, or that their immigration status will intentionally be disrupted by their abusive partner (YWCA Spokane, n.d.).

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) suggested strategies to prevent intimate partner violence include creating protective environments, strengthening economic supports, and reducing financial concerns. It also recommends teaching safe and healthy relationship skills and engaging with influential adults and peers for support.

Generally, marriage preparation courses include self-awareness and introspection, problem solving and conflict resolution skills, and building communication and relationship skills. Most are geared toward engaged or committed couples. The Silliman and Schumm (2000, 139) literature review conveys that "integrated research and program improvement hold the promise of significantly reducing distress, divorce, and marital violence and for enhancing couple functioning and those systems that they affect."

The research and literature review of longstanding marriage preparation programs, as well as feedback received from Before the Nikah students, show hopeful signs with regard to those single, never married, and previously married Muslims who participate. In this structured two-hour-a-week course held over a three-month period, students attend lectures, discussions, and activities on topics that focus on self-awareness, marriage from an Islamic perspective, and how to recognize green flags of a healthy relationship and red flags that may be a warning of impending domestic abuse early in the courtship phase. In addition, students recognize the Marriage Support Team© and Before the Nikah Vetting Process© as tools that can facilitate prevention of getting into an abusive marriage. They will be better able to identify a potentially abusive person before marriage and to discern the qualities of a healthy, empathetic potential spouse. Students become part of a community of course graduates, which gives them the needed support to implement the Before the Nikah principles. They are also encouraged to retake the course as many times as they like, to come back with a potential spouse, and to participate in premarital counseling and coaching prior to marriage.

Summary

After more than twenty years as a mental health practitioner working within the Muslim community, I have experienced the historic denial of domestic abuse and dysfunctional relationships. I have also seen more imams and community leaders become aware of this as a real community problem and indicate their readiness to address it and work to prevent it. While our community is not unlike the larger society when it comes to funding for prevention services, the increasing number of Muslim mental health professionals and community leaders has increased its awareness and willingness to find ways to promote healthy couples, families, and communities. Marriage preparation and premarital education for single, never-married, teen, and young adult Muslims is receiving more consideration as a strategy for preventing domestic violence and promoting healthy marriages and families. In the future, research efforts will be geared to determine the effectiveness of marriage preparation, premarital education, and counseling to prevent domestic violence among American Muslims .

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In Their Names: The National Effort to Document and Honor the Lives of Muslim Victims of Domestic Homicide

Denise Ziya Berte

From June 2022 until July 2022, there were three publicly reported murders of Muslim women, children, and extended family members by their Muslim husbands or former spouses, as well as another suspected case. In total, ten Muslim lives were lost. In these cases, the most frustrating and terrifying commonality is the lack of identifiable patterns. These women were married, divorced, and/or separated. In addition, not all of them wore the hijab, had children and/or college degrees, were immigrants, had family support, and/or had sought spiritual, legal, and social services. In all cases, the male perpetrator used a firearm and took his own life, thereby leaving two sets of families and the entire Muslim American community desperate for answers.

Domestic homicide is not a new phenomenon. In fact, it is well established not only in the United States, but also within the Muslim American community as well as Muslim-majority countries worldwide. Tragically, historical data reveals that it is precisely when a victim of domestic violence seeks help and tries to actively stop the pattern of abuse that she is the most vulnerable to death, serious injury, the kidnapping of her children, and so on.

The Peaceful Families Project (PFP, www.peacefulfamilies.org), a 21-year-old US-based national non-profit organization, seeks to eliminate family-based violence in Muslim homes using Islamic values and teachings through training research, resource development, and affiliated partnerships. While the Quran and Hadith are clear on women's rights (Quran 4:1); the model of a marriage based on love, compassion, and mercy creating peace for all involved (Quran 30:21); and the absolute prohibitions of oppression and mistreating women (Quran 4:19), somehow our communities find it difficult to uphold these most basic Islamic tenets.

Due to these recent tragic events, PFP is initiating a national/global project to both recognize and document the stories of, as well as honor, the victims of domestic homicide in Muslim communities located both here and abroad. The collected data are designed to help domestic violence experts understand the critical factors underlying these events and how we can prevent any more deaths. Equally, as a community we will be able to hear the victims' names and stories, make *du'a* for them, and place their lives in the high regard they deserve.

While we, as individual staff, board members, and researchers, are well aware of and understand deeply the effects of pervasive Islamophobia in many societies, we cannot use this as an excuse to turn away from the reality of domestic homicide in our midst. PFP is committed to gathering information about these narratives, for increasing our knowledge about the dangers of family-based

violence and honoring its victims is a basic human obligation that we, as Muslims, are called upon to do when confronted with such ongoing oppression. Having definitive data will help our community increase its awareness of family-based violence and create more effective responses to reduce and finally end this pervasive tragedy.

PFP asks each individual who knows of a victim or an incident of domestic homicide in the Muslim American community to participate in this effort. We extend our deepest gratitude for your willingness to participate in this critical activity. All information gathered will be analyzed in its conglomerate form, and no personal narrative will be used in an identifiable manner without first obtaining the explicit desire and permission of the appropriate family members or representative.

Field Notes: Reflections on Addressing Domestic Violence in American Muslim Communities

Bonita R. McGee and Shaina (Nur) Ayers

Introduction

Islam views the family as the cornerstone of society (Alwani 2007). Unfortunately, American Muslim families face challenges to their strength and foundational role in society as the social malaise that touches the larger society, such as violence and abuse, are present in their communities. Domestic violence (DV), also described as Intimate Partner Violence (IPV), gender-based violence (GBV), or family violence (FV), impacts families and communities regardless of race, class, socio-economic status, education, or religious affiliation. Muslim communities in the US have increasingly acknowledged and addressed the issue over the last twenty-plus years. Authors McGee and Ayers engaged community advocates, professionals, and imams to explore their entry into DV awareness work and reflections from the field regarding the progress observed during their respective tenures. The authors will provide a profile of the participant cohort and then describe their responses to a collection of prompts and inquiries, thereby highlighting their views on community support as well as those promising and best practices used by communities to raise awareness and support DV survivors, and share their recommendations and vision for the work's future. Finally, the authors will provide some final thoughts and recommendations.

Methodology

For this article, we focused our outreach to Muslim-based organizations (MBO) primarily serving Muslims, imams, and chaplains as well as other Muslim-identifying advocates. We used the Peaceful Families Project (PFP) website, resources page, and *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* (JIFP) editorial recommendations to identify and narrow the pool of interviewees. The final determination to use seven interviewees was based on their availability during the data collection period, geographic location diversity, and representation of various stakeholder classes (e.g., advocates, imams, and mental health and social service professionals). The authors conducted most interviews via Zoom, which were recorded for accuracy; others were conducted via phone only. A limitation of this study was the shortened window for data collection, as this resulted in gaps in the greater geographical representation and in securing organizations and advocates with long histories of addressing DV in American Muslim communities.

Participants identified as advocates, executive directors, academics, counselors, and imams. They resided in several states (e.g., Arizona, Ohio, Florida, and Virginia) and had at least fifteen years of experience in DV awareness in Muslim communities. Most participants indicated that their journey

toward doing the work was through volunteering locally with others. Some were inspired by DV advocates in their community; others by witnessing DV's impact. The spark of standing for justice through action and volunteerism started with one participant, currently an MBO executive director, when they were twelve years old. Others related that they consider their work a "calling to" or a "God-given" task to serve the community, help survivors, and address DV in their community.

Community Support and Continued Challenges

Participants across the collective experience acknowledged the increase in community support over the tenure of their work. This is, however, relative to the definition of "support" and how much it has increased. Through much effort, the awareness of, attitudes toward, and availability of resources have experienced greater levels of acceptance and response from the Muslim community. Influenced by creative efforts and more widely accepted by American-born or raised demographics, openness to engaging with programs and conversations around DV have made this issue less taboo. Active commitments from imams, advocates, and leaders to address topics relating to, or adjacent to, DV have aided in the conservative progress of support as deeper understandings of this reality have increased. This increased understanding has, in turn, allowed an increase in available resources. Still, diminishing the taboo around this topic has not decreased the stigma around engaging this issue. Consistently, however, the participants recognize that more support is needed, especially in terms of funding.

Creative methods of communication heavily influence support for DV awareness and intervention. As the psychology of words suggests, the language used in reference to a topic impacts how people perceive and feel about it. Though spoken about more often today compared to a decade ago, there is still a stigma and lack of understanding around DV, survivors, and its impact. Furthermore, cultural misunderstandings of abuse and DV further distort understandings of whether it is nonexistent in Muslim communities or only seen as an idea impacting "Westernized" survivors. For example, although DV's detrimental impact on the family unit inherently counters the essence of that unit in Islam, the term "domestic violence" is viewed as a Western concept. This impacts the community's recognition of what DV is and the harm caused – and that will continue to be caused – if it is not addressed.

Accordingly, in terms of responsiveness, a type of verbal gymnastics has become necessary in order to secure attention and promote action. Avoiding words about "abuse" helps increase support. Preventative measures are preferably worded as "peaceful family building" and "healthy communication." Fundraising efforts asking for charitable donations to struggling mothers and their children enjoy more success than fundraising requests for charitable donations for DV survivors. Overwhelmingly, participants acknowledge DV's ugliness as an area of

discomfort within the community. Hence, more community members support such survivors when other terminologies are used.

Between the stigma and a lack of understanding of DV's financial costs, survivors do not receive much financial support from the community. According to the majority of the participants, this fact is one of the most significant areas of opportunity. Mosques provide a limited amount of funds, as they do for any person in need. However, the recovery time a family needs to process the DV events and, at least for some who require professional development, to secure a job will take longer than a month or two. Safe houses offered through many non-Muslim organizations are also limited and not explicitly designed for Muslims. Additionally, one participant noted that one survivor's legal fees could cost more than $25,000. Unfortunately, depending on their educational level, occupation, or work status, survivors' ability to support themselves and their dependents may be a leading reason for their decision to remain in a harmful situation.

Best and Promising Practices

JIFP asked participants about the promising practices and trends they observed throughout their tenure. The following represents highlights shared from their collective observations from the field.

Participants cited imam training and support as a best practice recommendation. Imams need to be empowered so they can address DV through direct training and increase their capacity by building a support system that will enable them to more effectively address the challenges of supporting families facing violence in the home. Many participants noted that imams are often under-resourced and face incredibly high expectations. Addressing DV compounds those expectations to a degree that may be unreasonable and unachievable. Therefore, imams need mosque-based support systems so they can work with advocates, counselors, and other community-based organizations and institutions to support DV survivors and their families.

Holistic, survivor-centered advocacy is considered a best practice when engaging with survivors. This includes the expectation and assurance of confidentiality. In some communities, survivors are reluctant to engage with Muslim-based organizations and services or even share their stories, fearing that such organizations cannot maintain confidentiality. Many Muslim-based organizations are aware of this concern. American Muslim communities must ensure that survivors and those who serve them are safe to do the work.

Additionally, only trained volunteers and staff should engage with DV survivors. This approach is designed to ensure competency, the quality of the interaction, and the assurance of calm and patient explanation of the available services and options. Survivors, who are often overwhelmed and traumatized, may need the information to be repeated as they navigate their situation. Lastly, it

is a best practice to acknowledge and recognize the intersectional nature of the work and its impact on the survivors and their ability to navigate the many layers and barriers to re-establishing safety in their life and home. These may include, for example, challenges of immigration status, language, and access to services that will compound their already complex and unsafe situation.

Ensuring safe and secure shelter services was also noted as a best practice. Having inter- and intra-culturally sensitive safe spaces can impact the immediate and long-term safety of the survivor and her family. Communities have approached this issue differently. Some prefer and utilize Muslim-based shelter services; others work with their other faith and secular counterparts to provide safe shelter services for Muslim survivors. One respondent, an MBO executive director, stated that while shelters are fine, many women avoid them and that Muslim communities must find ways to serve those women who do not leave their homes.

Additional strategies mentioned as best practices were DV awareness events that explain its impact and promote prevention strategies that support healthy, violence-free homes. Having imams and community leaders regularly speak about this topic help sends a message to the community that DV exists, how it harms the survivor and her family, the necessity of communal support, and how it violates Islamic principles and prophetic examples and teachings.

Envisioning the Future: Recommendations and Considerations

When asked about their thoughts and recommendations for future work in DV awareness, participants envisioned the following:

Muslim communities prioritize and support survivors holistically in the form of safety, stable housing options, legal support, and child support. One participant noted that American Muslim communities need to do a better job of "wrapping our arms around our community." This sentiment showed through the various participant comments, reinforcing the belief that Muslims as a community must do better for its most vulnerable members and be unafraid to call an issue what it is so it can be fully acknowledged and addressed.

<u>Collaboration, Partnering, and Allyship</u>

Participants wanted to see increased collaboration and partnering among organizations. This includes, but is not limited to, Muslim-based social service organizations, mosques, and other social service providers. Increased networking allows organizations of different sizes and capacities to leverage resources, partner in awareness efforts and mentoring opportunities, and build capacity for sustainable best practice implementation. Participants also noted the importance of increasing Muslim male allyship in DV awareness, because this enables the community to see DV as a communal issue in which all of its members have a

role to play. Increased male allyship and advocacy also enable more opportunities for intervention, education, and awareness by asking the entire community to address this problem. While there was a notable trend and best practice of an increasing number of males in this arena, it remains a critical need if the community is to address DV comprehensively.

Additionally, some noted the importance of being unashamed as an organization operating from an Islamic framework. Furthermore, some cautioned that as organizations grow and engage in increased collaboration across secular and other faith organizations and institutions, the American Muslim community need not buy into those narratives that view religion, particularly Islam, as something to circumvent, as if it is not a part of the solution and therefore can be negotiated away. Organizations that follow this approach need a more robust response and support from the community if they are to remain sustainable.

Another aspect is ensuring that communities have enough volunteers and advocates who are well trained in addressing DV in Muslim communities. This goes for not only Muslims within their respective communities, but also for partners and allies serving Muslim clients. This increased capacity will help ensure that Muslim survivors, wherever they are, can be served competently and with respect.

Infrastructure, Institutions, and Sustainability

Succession planning was not limited to organizational leadership and sustainability, but also included the continued identification, mentoring, and promotion of new advocates within the community. Ideally, male advocates' growing presence will enable the increased presence of diverse voices to raise awareness and strengthen communities. Some of the participants envisioned building capacity through succession planning.

An imam recommended providing safe spaces for Muslim survivors in every major city nationwide; many participants echoed the sentiment. A range of possible strategies were offered, among them Muslim-built and -based shelters as well as leveraging existing partners and ally shelter systems. The range of opinion in terms of how vital Muslim-based shelter services can be based on the following factors: the community level's commitment, given the cost of upkeep and maintenance and residents' safety; the ability to leverage local resources and shelters and expanding partnerships; along with education and cultural competence, through collaboration, partnering, and trusted allies. Leveraging existing systems would require increased technical assistance and cultural competency training directed toward partners and allies. The result would expand the Muslim community's capacity to serve survivors comprehensively while keeping them connected to their community. The reality is that those safe space

solutions are not an either-or proposition, but more a spectrum of strategies based on the community's current and future capacity, needs, and commitment.

Participants raised networking and data sharing as essential components for building capacity. Growing and strengthening existing advocate networks will enable Muslim-based organizations and shelters to share relevant data about population and trends, partner in awareness and training activities, and create a data hub to deepen our community's understanding of the issue. This collaboration and data sharing will support the implementation of evidence-based interventions, awareness campaigns, and outreach.

Prevention, Awareness, and Intervention

Although pre-marital counseling can serve as a DV prevention strategy, solid marital foundations must be built within the Muslim community. The vision of such a service as a prerequisite was shared by a few participants, including imams and counselors. Even though such counseling offerings may vary in length and duration, most contain a framework for discussing critical topics that couples will face, along with exercises and tools to support constructive communication, and the fundamental relevant Islamic teachings.

For one participant, a social worker and community leader, effective counseling would include vetting partners and ensuring all parties' "informed consent." Establishing such a network would address a specific problem: abusers who move into new communities to continue the same behavior patterns, as that community has a very limited ability to vet and verify them.

American Muslim communities must address the role of accountability, as its members continue to struggle with DV's fallout in the home and community leaders and imams have conflicting or unclear goals. As a result, abusers go unchecked while survivors bear the brunt of any stigma associated with their decision to pursue divorce, separation, or counseling. Communities must effectively address both parties for the cycle of violence to be disrupted and stopped so that safety and healing can take root.

Abuser's intervention strategies often suffer from the barrier of incentive, and a lack of accountability exacerbates the barrier with continuous cycles of violence and stigma. A counselor participant noted that communities must "increase our understanding of and engagement with abusers, as they are not leaving our community, and we need not just punish or litigate." This participant further noted, "Unfortunately, our community does not hold people accountable. So it happens, and even when it is reported it is either minimized or not believed. And then there are no consequences for the abuser. So, because we do not hold them accountable as a community, there are no consequences." Some advocates and organizations are actively working on Abuser's intervention curriculums

based on or adapted to Islamic principles and prophetic examples and teachings. Others are working on Male Ally initiatives.

Community members must also consider DV's impact on the entire family, especially children, and create and support services that support children from violent homes. These children may also carry the shame and stigma of dysfunction within the home. One participant, an MBO executive director, noted that they had observed second-class citizenry in some mosques when dealing with this latter issue. The topic was further elaborated on by stating that "some masjids do not like to have children that are marginalized, so they shun them."

Training and Technical Assistance

Creating a new training curriculum for targeted groups or improving existing resources was a collective vision for most participants. Curriculum targeting imams was cited as being important. Although imam training programs already exist, it is not known how many curricula have been developed to train them. By creating a master training for chaplains and imams regarding DV, advocates can support consistent messaging and quality assurance as well as establish a baseline of accurate information. Male abusers are also a targeted population for intervention and training. Two participants are currently working on curricula, designed specifically for Muslim male abusers, that will be critical to many communities' ability to address DV comprehensively in the coming years.

Participants noted positive trends in the Muslim community, such as the increased amount of need-specific resources available to them over the last twenty years. Continued efforts to revise, improve, and develop resources that address DV in Muslim homes remains ongoing.

Frameworks and Concepts

There should be an effort to reconsider the narrative frameworks currently present in most DV awareness efforts. When observing how popular media and social media often frame such incidents, one often notes their focus on the survivor's circumstances and behavior. That may be effective for awareness building, but advocates who want to effect behavioral change must also address the abuser's behavior. Shifting the framework to address behavioral and social change will not happen by just talking to women. As one participant stated, "The victim may need more practical help, but he [the abuser] needs a lot of help to change."

Complementing this idea is the notion of promoting awareness and education regarding gender and healthy relationships as early as possible. As a prevention strategy, some participants recommended developing and engaging Muslims on gender and healthy relationships across the lifespan. Discussion of healthy relationships in curriculums serving Muslim youth help to reduce such incidents.

Final Thoughts

While this article helps shed light on the progress, barriers, and emerging trends in addressing DV in American Muslim communities, it only reflects a small segment of the advocates and community members. It is not comprehensive; rather, it illustrates the need to expand the effort to learn more from the field about these issues. One recommendation is for more research and exploration. Moreover, the authors have additional recommendations regarding what community members can do to implement the recommendations and sustain the progress of the efforts illustrated in this article.

More engagement and research are needed to support communities and advocates to address DV effectively. Areas for continued research and reporting include, but are not limited to, understanding the prevalence and attitudes toward violence in the home. This includes deepening our understanding of the types of abuse within this community, reporting them in aggregate form, and then breaking down by demographic and other relevant factors when they are shown to be statistically significant.

For researchers engaged in field qualitative research: Ensure adequate outreach and buy-in from local organizations to provide an adequate context and history of DV in the community. Additionally, be proactive in establishing a feedback loop for those advocates and subjects engaged in the research to inform them of the research's progress and how their work is impacting the larger field of study. Grassroots workers and advocates may hold researchers at arm's length and, in some cases, display skepticism due to their perception that such people are only interested in publishing and not the cause. Communities should consider partnering with local universities and researchers to engage in more community-based participatory research. This approach could be more beneficial for both parties, as it seeks to build capacity in the larger community, support the development of a shared narrative, and more readily translate data into actionable strategies.

For Muslim-based organizations, masjids, and community centers, network to support a consortium for data collection and reporting: The benefits of establishing even a minimal data set would support local, regional, and national efforts in technical assistance and supporting survivors. America is home to one of the world's most diverse Muslim populations, a reality that often presents many challenges when providing services. The ethical and secure use of data ensure that organizations serving Muslims can rely and build upon evidence-based and -informed interventions.

Imams, scholars, and community leaders do not need to reinvent the wheel to address violence in the home: Seek the guidance, buy-in, and partnership of those who do the work daily. Utilize platforms to heighten awareness, promote accurate and consistent messaging, and encourage community members to take

concrete steps. These efforts will enable the activation of volunteers, cause the desired shift in mindsets and behavior, and go a long way to ensuring the survivors' safety.

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Book Review

Martin Nguyen. *Modern Muslim Theology: Engaging God and the World with Faith and Imagination*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019.

In his latest book, Martin Nguyen makes an important contribution to contemporary studies of Islamic theology. Building on current outlooks that emphasize the intellectual and cerebral life of the Muslim believer, he introduces readers to what a practical theology might look like when it goes beyond neo-classical portrayals to embrace the religious imagination. In doing so, he charts future territory for studies in Islamic theology, pointing them in a direction that moves away from expert-led dialogues to a layperson-centered perspective. He is clear in stating that this book is not an attempt to recast or to revive any specific historical discourse or discipline, but to reconceive of theology altogether in a way that attends mainly to "the fostering of faith" (2).

Despite its modest length, Nyugen largely accomplishes this goal. While his treatment is not exhaustive, each chapter aims to reframe a fundamental concept that is essential to his account. He begins with the concept of language, where he explains the necessity for modern Muslim theology to strictly remain in the English "logosphere" to remain accessible to non-experts (21). Nguyen then goes on to critique modern conceptions of time that both interfere with a creative engagement with revelation and tradition and impair the fostering of religious thought. Our "postdomestic" culture obscures death and matters of the end times while internalizing a linear, quantifiable notion of time that focuses our attention on anything but the present moment, where the "fullness of God" resides (31). Modern time not only prevents us from fully engaging with God, but also distorts how we receive and think of revelation. This distortion is due in part to the prevalent essentialist accounts of tradition that portray "authentic tradition" as a phenomenon that took place in — and remains in — the past. In other words, this non-imaginative view conceives of the religious tradition as an artifact in need of preservation, the way material artifacts are preserved in Western museums. Putting the tradition to use would violate its integrity as a genuine artifact; instead, it is something to be admired from afar.

Against this tendency to fossilize tradition, Nyugen argues for a dynamic, living view of it. The multi-faceted and complex Islamic tradition is more like the Ka‘bah in Makkah than an artifact gathering dust. It has undergone change and restoration, and yet it remains with us into the present. Similarly, a modern Muslim theology must acknowledge that human traditions are ongoing constructs that evolve from one generation to the next. Interacting with the tradition is required for the transformative experiences that a life of faith is meant to engender. Conceptualizing the tradition in this way calls for the religious

imagination, which Nyugen describes as "an important human faculty that can be marshalled like our sense and our reason in order to think theologically" (68).

Having set this foundation, Nyugen proceeds, in the heart of the book, to illustrate the purpose and function of religious imagination in a life of faith. He argues that no aspect of the Islamic faith can be grasped fully without a deep and penetrating imagination and creative engagement. The Qur'an and reports of Prophet Muhammad are not only replete with images, symbols, and stories for our imagination to feed on, but also are actually directed primarily at this faculty, even more than they address the intellect (*'aql*). Islamic soteriology and eschatology, for instance, call on Muslims to constantly exercise their imaginative thinking. It is not only the basic tenets of the Muslim faith that require imagination, but the highest forms of piety and religiosity as well. Excellence (*ihsān*) in the Islamic tradition is described as worshipping God "as though" we see Him. Nyugen's central claim is that imagination is crucial both to the Islamic tradition and to a Muslim's spiritual life.

If imaginative thinking is so central, why and how has a rationalist discourse come to dominate theological discussions? In what are perhaps some of the book's strongest passages, Nyugen problematizes the scholarly tradition's emphasis on the intellect as the "seat of consciousness" and the faculty responsible for receiving and fostering faith. He argues that it is due to the success of medieval Muslim scholars in appropriating Aristotelian views that the rationalist emphasis has endured so strongly in Islamic theological accounts. The Hellenistic construct of the human as the "rational animal" has come to be an uncontested fact when, in reality, "there is no fixed, universal form of reason." Instead, there are only "rationalities that are conditioned by and developed within traditions" (79-80). There is no reason that the human being is a "rational animal" any more than she is a symbolic or religious or liturgical animal.

In the face of overly rationalistic discussions of theology, which Nyugen sees as having a debilitating effect on alternative theologies, he instead advances the view that the task of modern theology is in dire need of new and creative perspectives that give prime of place to the imagination over and above the intellect. Imagination is not simply a mental process or act of the mind, but an "embodied activity" (87) with the potential to revive critical aspects of faithful life, such as the cultivation of empathy and compassion. Of all the possible realms where imagination plays a role, however, Nyugen focuses on prayer in the remaining chapters.

Prayer, and particularly its defining moment of prostration, is "a wildly radical act" (89-90) that represents and epitomizes Nyugen's imaginative theology: "A faithful theology of response must be a theology of prostration" (115). To demonstrate his position, he begins by tracing historical views on the relationship between faith and action expounded by Mu'tazilī, Ash'arī, and

Māturīdī scholars. All emphasize a critical link between faith and action, and any differences between their views only strengthens Nyugen's premise that traditional views are not hegemonic ideologies to be defended, but rather conversations to be revisited and re-negotiated over time.

He then provides a brief biographical sketch of two Muslim figures, one classical and the other contemporary, to illustrate how a life of faith can be animated through engagement with religious imagination. Both Abu Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) and Malcolm X (d. 1965) faced skepticism, doubt, and severe challenges to their faith and yet overcame these by refashioning their relationship to faith in bold and unanticipated ways. Al-Ghazālī's response was to articulate a theology that rejected blind imitation (*taqlīd*) in matters of faith, and Malcolm X's theological orientation emphasized the need for faith to constructively respond to the social and psychological ills of one's context. In both cases, the journey back to faith featured a moment of prayer at its tipping point.

According to Nguyen, the key to nurturing a practical, imagination-driven theology lies in prayer and prostration. The timing of prayer re-acquaints us with the rhythms of sacred time. Prayer is where revelation and response meet, the former in the form of Qur'anic recitation and the latter in the form of supplication, both integral aspects of Muslim prayer. The very form of prayer, in its climactic moment of prostration, places the heart above the head. And the advice of Prophet Muhammad regarding prayer, "Pray as though it is your last prayer," is a call to the imagination in the very act that symbolizes the religion as a whole (175).

In the end, Nyugen makes a compelling case for why Muslim theologians should occupy themselves with the new terrain he scouts in *Modern Muslim Theology*. He concludes in the hopes that his theology of prayer and prostration has served as a "demonstration of what can be achieved if we take theology and the imagination seriously" (183). Above all, Nyugen urges that future studies in Islamic theology pay increasing attention to aesthetic considerations, particularly the power of poetry: "Ours is a time in need of poetry" (184). He calls scholars of Islamic theology to "undertake the practice of theology with great care, courage, and imagination" and to "be attentive to aesthetics" and "embrace the beautiful" in future works (184-85). Nyugen makes a major contribution to ongoing discussions about Islamic theology by challenging the accepted wisdom and perduring assumptions that operate in the field, as well as by inviting students and scholars alike to reimagine key concepts in light of a practical theology.

Amani Khelifa

Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice
Call for Papers: The Family in the American Muslim Context

The *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* is an annual double-blind peer-reviewed online academic and interdisciplinary journal published by Indiana University and sponsored by the Islamic Seminary Foundation. The *Journal* invites colleagues to submit articles for publication that combine intellectual rigor with community engagement. The *Journal* aims to provide a platform for scholars, students, and researchers to exchange their latest findings and to foster dialogue among them and community leaders regarding the Islamic faith and its practice in America. To this end, successful proposals will reflect theoretical and methodological sophistication and engagement with existing scholarship, while also being accessible to non-specialists.

The fifth edition of the *Journal* will discuss and analyze **The Family in the American Muslim Context**. Its aim is to synthesize and advance both theoretical and empirical research on this topic within education, sociology, political science, healthcare, psychology, ecology, social service, the arts, and other relevant disciplines. Colleagues interested in publishing a conference summary and book reviews are also welcomed.

The timeline for peer review and publication is approximately 5 to 6 months.

This issue will include the following**:**

- Theoretical papers: How do we examine and analyze American Muslim contributions in terms of developing methodologies and frameworks to approach the Qur'an, Sunna, and Islamic traditions as they relate to the family?

- Historical studies: How do we read and examine historical events, individuals, and organizations that influence the American Muslim community's understanding of the family?

- American Islamic praxis papers: How do we examine the new practices, traditions, and cultures developing within the American Muslim community as they relate to the family?

- Case studies, qualitative interviews, and oral histories of key individuals or organizations: How do we examine and evaluate the conduct of American Muslims' religious leadership, including the role of scholars,

imams, and chaplains, with respect to responding to the internal and external challenges facing families?

Possible Topics

Papers should focus on how the family relates to key contemporary issues facing American Muslims, such as those listed below. We are also open to other topics that fit within the primary theme of this volume.

- Changing Family Structures and Dynamics in the American Muslim Community
- Parenting from an Islamic Perspective
- Instilling Family Values and Responsibility in Children
- Developing Children's Values through Sports
- Nurturing Care and Compassion in the Family
- Adapting to the Changing Nature of Youth Challenges
- Family, Youth, Social Media, and the Internet
- The Impact of the Family on Education
- Islamic Schools, Public Schools, and the Role of Family
- Family and Gender Issues
- Family and Mental Health
- Addressing the Root Causes of Family Challenges
- Building Family Stability in the American Muslim Community
- The Role of the Masjid, Organizations, and Community in Supporting Families
- The Impact of Public Policy on the Family

Guidelines for Authors

***Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* Invites:**

- Social science- and humanities-based research papers reflecting on all aspects related to the Islamic faith and its practice in America.
- Abstracts of dissertations, theses, and research findings related to the American Muslim community: 700-1,000 words.
- Shorter reflection pieces by activists, imams, and chaplains: 2,000-3,000 words.

Assembly of the Manuscript: Standard research papers should be 7,000-10,000 words in length or longer, if approved by the editor. The article should be in Microsoft Word format. All submissions must conform to the *Journal* guidelines: original, unpublished research; double-spaced and single-sided; and

in the Chicago Style. The manuscript must contain the following parts: Title, an abstract, 3-5 keywords, text, references, footnotes, tables, figures, and appendices. Not all papers will have all elements. However, if they do, this is the order in which they should be arranged.

Submission of the Manuscript:

- Send a brief note of intent to contribute noting the type, scope, and focus of your submission by December 15, 2022. You will receive a note of acceptance/non-acceptance by mid-January 2023.
- Send the completed paper by June 1, 2023, as an attachment, along with a 250-word abstract, 3-5 keywords, and a 150-word author bio.
- Decision Date after First Review: July 15, 2023
- Submission Deadline of Revised Manuscript: August 1, 2023
- Publication Date: September 2023

Submissions are accepted via e-mail: journal@islamicseminary.org

The authors of accepted contributions will be invited to present their papers to the *Journal of Islamic Faith and Practice* track at the Islamic Seminary Foundation's annual Shura at Yale University in 2024.

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