

Islamic and Secular Perspective in Gender Politics in Pakistan: Exploring Diversity in Ideologies and practices of Jamaat-e-Islami and NGOs

*Zara Shehzad

**Waheed Chaudhry

Abstract

Following September 11, 2001 terrorists' attacks in New York, the debate over gender in Muslim societies has taken a new form in which "women" are explained and judged through pre-defined assumptions. As the Western world suddenly discovered the "miserable" and "depressed" condition of Muslim women and took a passionate stand to safeguard their rights, women's socio-religious practices (such as *pardah*) were interpreted as a sign of their oppression. Drawing on yearlong ethnographic fieldwork with women workers of Jamaat-e-Islami and NGOs in Islamabad Pakistan, this paper examines their diverse worldviews, and explicates how and in what ways Muslim women possess distinct personalities that are hard to justify with single identity of "oppressed" and "suffered". By highlighting the activism of Jamaat-e-Islami and NGOs women workers on the cases of Malala Yousafzai and Aafia Siddqui, the paper shows different ways of utilizing the power of agency, shaped under specific organizational habitus. It argues that there is a need to study Muslim women under the structures in which they are incorporated to explore how they attain a sense of purpose and wellbeing.

Keywords: Women, Activism, Jamaat-e-Islami, NGOs, Agency; Habitus.

A large corpus of scholarship in social sciences represents the sufferings of Third World women and takes this to demonstrate male authority in these societies.¹ Some consider women sufferings as the colonial projection in which their "miserable" conditions led the colonizers to legitimize their rule and establish the idea of "saving brown women from brown men".² Yet for others, such as Jasmine Zine (2002), the depiction of Muslim women as suffering subjects serves to justify all type of armed interventions "under the trope of "liberation" as was the earlier formula in colonial intervention to keep control in the Muslim world".³ Hasan (2005) traces this tradition with "triple orientalizing" in which the image of Muslim women was presented in three folds: (1) oriental, (2) woman (3) and Muslim.⁴ Such construction of women can be compared with the work of Gayatri Spivak (1988) who also constructed the image of

*Ph.D Scholar, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

Visiting Fellow, Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.

**Assistant Professor, Department of Anthropology, Quaid-e-Azam University, Islamabad.

¹ Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (New York: Yale University Press, 1992). See also Nawal El Saadawi, *The Nawal El Saadawi Reader* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997). Sherene Razack, *Casting out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" *Reflections on the History of an Idea* (1988): pp. 21-78. Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question*. (London: Routledge, 1994).

² Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" *Reflections on the history of an idea* (1988): 21-78.

³ Jasmin Zine, "Muslim Women and the Politics of Representation." *American journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 19, no. 4 (2002): 2.

⁴ Md Mahmudul Hasan, "The Orientalization of Gender." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 22, no. 4 (2005): 26, 32.

women in three folds: poor, black, and female to highlight the intensity of discrimination.⁵

After 9/11, when terrorist attacks fuelled “war on terror”, the increased hate for Muslims was complimented by a “moral” war for saving Muslim women.⁶ Zine (2006), writing in the context of 9/11, argued about a racial and gender politics played over the identity of Muslim women, which aimed to define and regulate female identity under “gendered Islamophobia.”⁷ Thus, the image of vulnerable and marginalized Muslim women was used to legitimize armed intervention, such as the attack of Afghanistan. For instance, in her radio address, Laura Bush stated, “...Because of our recent military gains in much of Afghanistan, women are no longer imprisoned in their homes. They can listen to music and teach their daughters without fear of punishment...The fight against terrorism is also a fight for the rights and dignity of women.”⁸ In becoming the champion of women rights, the western world applied what Edward Said (1979)⁹ has rightly called an orientalist framework in which the agency of the orient (or of the Muslim women) and reality of women’s experiences were completely ignored.¹⁰

In this situation, how can we conceptualize Muslim women’s everyday practices through different popular binaries such as religious/secular and traditional/modernist? Such ways of understanding women usually restrict consideration of women’s identity beyond some dominant available perspectives. Scholars referred these ways of perceiving women as an “en-framing of reality,”¹¹ “the colonial move,”¹² and the “exercise of power.”¹³ Arthur Escobar (2004), most importantly, relates it to the “imperial globality” and “global coloniality.”¹⁴ His work tries to analyze ideas and practices beyond pre-

⁵ Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?" 21-78.

⁶ Evelyn Alsultany, *Arabs and Muslims in the Media: Race and Representation after 9/11*. (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

⁷ Jasmin Zine, "Between orientalism and fundamentalism: The Politics of Muslim Women's Feminist Engagement." *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 3, no. 1 (2006): 27.

⁸ Mike Allen, "Laura Bush Gives Radio Address," Washington Post, Accessed February 18, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/politics/2001/11/18/laura-bush-gives-radio-address/670a30a8-7c47-4669-a888-b88735fe68dc/?utm_term=.1c7cf8e99e64

⁹ Edward Said, *Orientalism*. (London: Penguin Books, 1978).

¹⁰ Sondra Hale, *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism, and the State*. (London: Routledge, 1996). See also,

Lara Deeb, *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Fida Adelv. "Educating Women for Development: The Arab Human Development Report 2005 and the Problem with Women's Choices." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 41, no. 1 (2009): p. 122a. Lila Abu-Lughod, *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2013). Sherine Hafez, *An Islam of her own: Reconsidering religion and secularism in women's Islamic movements*. (New York: NYU Press, 2011).

Sherene Razack, *Casting out: The eviction of Muslims from Western law and politics*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008). Maira, Sunaina. "'Good' and 'Bad' Muslim Citizens: Feminists, Terrorists, and US Orientalisms." *Feminist Studies* 35, no. 3 (2009): 631-656.

¹¹ Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt*. (New York: University of California Press, 1991).

¹² Chandra Mohantv. "Under Western Eves: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." *Feminist Review* 30, no. 1 (1988): 61-88.

¹³ Homi Bhabha, "Representation and the Colonial Text: A Critical Exploration of Some Forms of Mimeticism" *The Theory of Reading* (1984): 97.

¹⁴ Arturo Escobar, "Beyond the Third World: imperial globality, global coloniality and anti-globalisation social movements." *Third World Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (2004): 2019-220.

defined categories such as modernity and the Third World and suggests that there are other worlds and perspectives possible to imagine. He argues that pre-defined discourses limit our ability to think and imagine beyond the closed doors.

By the term “imperial globality”, Escobar refers to a global level presentation of Eurocentric norms (on issues such as women empowerment, women freedom, women modernization, and so on) and a way of life that has privileged West (or Western women) over the rest (Third World women).¹⁵ This, according to him, happens through the process of “global coloniality” which suppresses local cultures and places their knowledge and experiences in a marginal position.¹⁶ Although, he criticizes the sole Western paradigm for viewing the reality in the context of development and modernity, this paper uses his ideas to understand unilineal way of deciphering everyday practices of women in Muslim societies. He is useful for this analysis because he contends that there is a need for emancipation from the restricted paradigms (either of development or modernity or feminism) to see the reality (such as Third World for Escobar and Muslim women in this case) in an alternate way. In other words, he proposes to see beyond the fixed.¹⁷

Escobar stresses the importance of looking at things from multiple dimensions. He believes in de-Westernizing (for the sake of exploring other perspectives) the ideas (including social and economic) to access the voice of difference (Escobar 2004). He argues for the possibility of imagining the world beyond the restrictive lens and understanding local norms and values within local cultural context. By negating the Western way of understanding the reality, Escobar emphasizes in highlighting the politics of difference where people’s diverse engagements are ignored, and their individuality is categorized under collective terms. This paper takes Escobar’s idea “beyond the Third World” to present diverse perspectives of women of JI and NGOs in Pakistan on the issue of defining women’ and suggests that “other worlds are possible” and that contemporary scholarship should go beyond the fixed articulation of Muslim women’s identity and experiences.¹⁸

This article explicates the opinions of the women workers of JI and NGOs and examines how they perceive “womanhood” in the context of Pakistan. It develops on Saba Mahmood’s (2001) idea that “it is important to take into consideration the desires, commitments, and aspirations of the people to whom these practices are important”.¹⁹ Mahmood (2001) links Muslim women’s specific experiences to the notion of autonomy and argues that an autonomous will is the expression of positive freedom. She argues that if the actions are determined by a person’s free will and consent, they must be respected and tolerated.²⁰ Women either of religious or non-religious affiliation are equally capable of using their freedom. Serene Khader (2018) raises a similar concern and suggests that following local cultural traditions and adherence to religion are not always incompatible to the notion of freedom. While building up on the transnational feminist theory, she supports the concept of “non-ideal universalism” that challenges the standardization of

¹⁵ Ibid. 216

¹⁶ Ibid. 207.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid. 220.

¹⁹ Saba Mahmood, "Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival." *Cultural Anthropology* 16, no. 2 (2001): 225.

²⁰ Ibid. 207.

the Western (one-way and fixed) values over the women living in other parts of the world, and specifically in Muslim societies.²¹ Both Mahmood and Khader are interested to see Muslim women's life experiences as the expression of their free will, beyond the single and fixed imaginary of "women freedom" in which the escape from religion and tradition is set as the goal for individual emancipation. Developing on these concepts, the paper argues that there is a need to see the women working in JI and with NGOs with different lens. They are diverse in various aspects; develop agency that is influenced by their specific habitus; and use this agency to attain happiness and a sense of wellbeing. The article is based on yearlong anthropological fieldwork (2013-2014) in urban Islamabad to investigate women's world views from two different habitus sites: pro-religion (from the women workers of JI, *halqa-i-khawateen*), and pro-liberal (from the women workers of NGOs). Considering the diversity of respondents, a comprehensive open-ended interview-guide was developed and 38 in-depth-interviews (22 interviews from JI; 16 from NGOs) were conducted; five focus group discussions that usually involved eight to twelve women, and six detailed case studies. To keep a deep contact with the interlocutors, participant observation was done by partaking in Quranic circles, public demonstrations of JI and NGOs, seminars and other daily activities. The data included in this paper relied on the formal and informal discussions with the interlocutors as well as on secondary sources such as newspapers, the internet, archival material, and organizational (JI and NGOs) resources.

Diverse beings: Women of JI and NGOs:

In September 2014, Aisha remarked, "I am not only a woman but a Muslim woman, and I am proud of this!" It was a pleasant morning, and intense heat of the summer was still prevailing. In her late 20s, Aisha was an active worker (*karkun*) of Jamaat-e-Islami—a religious political organization set up during the British era. With a smile on her face, she proudly told that she is a part of a *tanzeemi* family that has association with JI's ideology from generations. Her parents and grandparents were devoted workers of JI, her elder sister was working in JI as a senior member (*rukun*) and her younger brother was an energetic part of Islami Jamiat-e-Taliba—a student wing of JI. While growing up in such a family, JI was an embodied part of her "self", as she commented, "Sometimes I feel that I am not a part of JI, but JI is within me." She recalled that she used to take part in different JI activities from her childhood, and that was how her personality was shaped under the ideological influence of JI. With a confident gesture and an exciting smile, she reasoned that Islam has an active role in influencing every act of a pious woman. This, she explained, she had learned as being part of JI.

Just five kilometers away towards the south, in a posh suburb of Sector F7, an office of a Women-focused NGO is located. There, the female workers of NGO support a completely different point of view about women freedom. Shumaila, a female NGO worker in her mid-30s had a different take about what it means to be a woman. She has worked as a Program Officer in development sector over the last 13 years. She described her entry into the development sector because of her background in sociology. Folding a scarf around her neck, she looked very confident. She told that she was not planning to marry in near future and argued that marriages often result in women's suppression. She was an admirer of women's free choice, and her brown eyes would glow with energy

²¹ Serene Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

when she spoke about women's right. Leaning back on her chair, she said, "a woman must explore her freedom beyond the shackles of patriarchy, and religion should not be used as an exploitative tool against women. Her ideas about woman selfhood were linked to the larger claims of contemporary NGOs that stressed to look at woman as a free and independent being.

The narratives mentioned above are the reflection of contestation on the definition of a woman between the workers of JI and NGOs that is visible in their activism on women. Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) was founded in 1941 by an Islamic scholar, Syed Abul A'la Maududi in Lahore, British India. Maududi was an Islamic thinker and aimed to implement Islamic laws through political strive. In addition to writing different books on Islamic shariah, he produced an extensive literature on women such as *Purdah and the Status of Woman in Islam* (2010)²² and *Khawateen aur deeni masayl (Women and Religious Problems)* (2000).²³ After Partition in 1947, JI Pakistan is highly active to establish Islamic shariah in the country. For this cause, the party is associated with other similar groups in different countries around the world. It is working with similar name in India, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Kashmir. In other countries, it has strong networking with religio-political parties such as UK Islamic Mission and Turkish Refah party. Before Zia regime, the second military dictator who ruled the country from 1977 to 1988, JI faced severe government repression but during Zia era, the party became influential in promoting Islamization in the country and maintained its influence over policies. For instance, JI was at the forefront in leading riots and protests against the Ahmadiyya minority group and similar blasphemous movements. The significant influence that the party enjoys is due to the coherent and organized internal structure that produces commitment from the workers, consistency in educational activities, discipline and strong party control. The party has seen some transformations also. For example, despite of JI founder's disapproval on women public appearance, now JI allows women to come out of their homes and play their role in spreading Islamic knowledge. The party has formed a separate women wing known as "*Halq-e-Khawateen*" in 1994 for this purpose.

The conflict between JI and non-religious women groups is widely evident in Pakistan. For example, if we see the history of NGOs in Pakistan, we can understand this divide between Islamism and modernity. Like JI, NGOs appeared soon after partition. The first politically active women organization was "All Pakistan Women Association" established in 1949 for advocating the rights of women. The decade of 1970s was the major point of NGOs' uplift in Pakistan. With the United Nations celebration of women decade in 1976, multiple NGOs for the rights of women appeared in the country. In the same year, the government started registering NGOs under the category of volunteer organizations that led in huge increase in their number. However, in the period of General Zia's Martial Law in 1977, NGOs faced great repression. After the 2005 earthquake, there was again a dramatic increase in the number of NGOs. However, when CIA killed a renowned terrorist Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad in 2011, the government of Pakistan blamed a few international organizations for implicitly supporting the raid. Consequently, the state banned 29 international NGOs, ordering them to leave the country within 60

²² Syed Abul A'la Maududi, *Purdah & the status of woman in Islam* (Translated & Edited by Al-Ash'ari). (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2010).

²³ Syed Abul A'la Maududi, *Khawateen aur Deeni Masayl* (Women and Religious Issues). (Lahore: Islamic Publications, 2000).

days. Later, most of them were granted permission under the new INGOs registration policy framework. Yet, there is a continuous contestation between the state and civil society in present day Pakistan.

Now NGOs who are working on issues such as women education, empowerment, and reproductive rights, face serious threats from right-wing religious groups who consider them as a risk to traditional religious-cultural values. After 9/11 this suspicion increased, and NGOs were accused as Western agents because of their aid-connection with their Western donors. In these circumstances when the public discourse does not consider NGOs as an appropriate channel to bring change in the status of women in Pakistan, it highlighted the role of right-wing religio-political parties like JI in addressing women issues.

The purpose of this paper is not to criticize any religious or liberal organization rather to highlight their diverse ideologies and practices regarding women issues in contemporary Pakistan. The activism of JI and NGOs over woman often get caught on the debate of an “ideal” Pakistani woman. They often used the phrase “*qoum ki beti*” or the daughter of the nation to argue how an ideal or true daughter of the nation should act like. The phrase is important in two ways: first, the word daughter is emotionally loaded, usually carries the meaning of personal attachment, and second, when the word daughter is enjoined with nation, it creates a nation-wide sentiment.²⁴ Therefore, the phrase, the daughter of the nation, provokes a sense of attachment, which is collective as well as personal. In everyday cultural usage, the word *beti* is associated with *izzat* (honor), and when it is a *qoum ki beti*, this mean she is the honor of the whole nation. Both, JI and NGOs used this phrase of “the daughter of the nation” to invoke political activism for other women of Pakistan. This kind of activism was clearly articulated by the cases of Malala Yousafzai and Aafia Siddiqui – two Pakistani women for whom JI and NGOs reserved different opinions.

Malala Yousafzai:

Malala was born into a Pashtun family on 12 July 1997, in the city of Mingora, Swat Valley, Pakistan. As the Taliban’s influence spread in her area in 2008-09, girls’ education and schools were severely targeted. She started writing a blog for BBC in early 2009²⁵ under a pseudo name “*Gul Makai*” which means cornflower. She raised concern for girl’s education and started to be known as the youngest female child activist. She was nominated for International Children’s Peace Prize in 2011 and was also awarded Pakistan’s National Youth Peace Prize. On 9 October 2012, when she was on her way to home from school, she was shot by Taliban on the left side of her head. After going through multiple surgeries, in 2013, she was able to go to a school in UK. This attack by Taliban sparked wide international support and sympathies for Malala. She was asked to give speech at the United Nation for her struggle for girl’s education, and later she co-authored an award-winning autobiographical book *I Am Malala* in 2013. The European Parliament awarded Malala prestigious Sakharov Prize. This all reached to its height when in October 2014, Malala has given Nobel Peace Prize and became youngest Nobel laureate. Currently, she is living in Birmingham and active for the rights of girls’ education throughout the world.

²⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁵ “Malala Yousafzai: Portrait of the girl blogger,” BBC, accessed August 3, 2018, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-19899540>

The attack on Malala was condemned by JI, however, they did not own her in their political activism. When asked about the reason, many showed their disapproval for the “Western Malala”—the one who was openly criticizing traditional norms and values of Pakistani society on the international media. When asked why not a woman should be appreciated for her bravery in Pakistan if the world is praising her, they argued, “why only Malala?” “why not other thousands of girls who were wounded during Taliban regime?” According to JI women workers, the case of Malala had special significance for the West from the start.

JI women workers mostly expressed their doubts on Malala because of an exceptional appreciation she received from the Western world. According to Rabbia, a JI women worker, incidents like this were happening with every other girl in Pakistan on daily basis, “but why Malala”? She argued that there were other heroic personalities from Pakistan that never received attention from the West. “Why the West is so much interested only in Malala, why not in Aitzaz Hasan”—a boy who gave his life by preventing a suicide bomber entering a school in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The criticism was further pronounced after the launch of the book, *I am Malala*. Rabbia said, “After reading some pages of Malala’s book, I was only shocked that how a person can so openly criticize her own culture and society.” Some even said that the book was mostly dominated by the interpretations of the co-author, Christina Lamb, “it does not seem that the book was written by a child in such a good English (hinting Malala).” JI women workers stated that Malala is a puppet in hands of West—the one who could be used to ventriloquize Western critiques of Pakistan as a failed state, and Islam as an oppressive religion.

Unlike JI, many NGOs supported the fight of Malala for girls’ education. “She has made the whole nation proud, she is the true daughter of the nation (*qoum ki beti*),” Sania, a young NGO worker said. The NGOs women workers interviewed echoed Sania’s point. They condemned the attack on Malala, and most importantly, praised her struggle for women’s freedom and rights. Speaking about Malala, they often said that she is a proud (*gharoor*) of the nation, a hope (*umeed*) which can be the identity (*shanakht*) of many oppressed women. With such strong words of praise, they suggested those people who criticize her are a part of patriarchal structure who do not want to see this nation progressing. Sania stated that the Pakistani nation has never appreciated its heroes, “the first who won the Nobel Prize was labelled as an infidel (Dr. Abdul Salam), and the second was considered a traitor (Malala).”²⁶ They believed that Malala has actually presented a positive image of the Pakistani society on the global level—an image that suggests that Pakistani women have their own identity, voice, personality, or in one word, their own individual agency.

The NGOs women workers stated that Malala is a symbol of strength and power for women. She advocates the rights of girls’ education and condemned those who wanted to control women’s mobility. For them, Malala should be considered as a role model for women’s struggle for freedom. “With Malala, there is a new beginning of women’s movement in Pakistan,” Sania argued. For her, now NGOs were not alone in their struggle for women’s rights, but national heroes like Malala were also a part of this. Many argued that the attack on Malala as an attack on women’s freedom and

²⁶ Dr. Abdul Salam and Malala Yousafzai are the two Nobel Laureates from Pakistan. The first won the award on his contribution to the electroweak unification theory in the discipline of physics.

empowerment. Sania related the attack on Malala with male superiority. She further explained that women with modern and bold identity, who are aware of their rights, and courageous enough to demand them, are like a throne in patriarchy. For Sania and many other NGOs women workers, those who think that attack on Malala was a Western conspiracy, are the greatest supporters of patriarchy.

For NGOs, Malala was a true daughter of the nation because she struggled to present a modern, resisting, and confident image of a Pakistani woman to the world. Her success was considered as the success of the whole nation. They often said “Malala is Pakistan”—suggesting that she is not an individual but a symbolic representation of the whole nation.

Such expression from NGOs were often voiced on national media, either in newspapers or in television talk shows. Interestingly, JI avoided sharing their concerns on Malala on the national media or in the public. There was not even a single protest in the support of or against Malala from JI. Unlike NGOs, JI women workers shared such views mostly in private, with researcher who assured them to use their pseudonyms and hide their identity. This was opposite to the case of Aafia, for whom JI members fiercely debated on the television, newspaper, and radio; shared pamphlets and organized demonstrations and public protests. Aafia, unlike Malala, was not a hero in Western (and mostly in American) media, and considered an embodiment of distrust, fundamentalism, and terrorism. However, for JI women workers, Aafia was an innocent Pakistani woman who was played in the hands of America. Aafia, for JI women workers, was an embodiment of middle-class Pakistani woman, who needed a voice, whose story needed telling, and for whom there was no one.

Aafia Siddiqui:

Born in March 1972 in Karachi, Aafia went to the US in 1990 to complete her graduate and post graduate studies. She belonged to an educated upper middle-class family. Following her graduation, her marriage was arranged with a Pakistani medical student Muhammad Amjad Khan, who joined her in the US. However, the arranged marriage did not end up well, and the couple started having problems—with some reports of domestic violence. As she completed her PhD in neuroscience and had two children with her abusive husband, Aafia decided to move back to Pakistan. This was also the time of terrorist attack in America in September 2001. After a year—now pregnant with another child—Aafia separated from her husband. In Pakistan, Aafia was not satisfied with the job opportunities, and in 2003, travelled to the US for 10 days for a job interview. While waiting for the interview’s outcomes back in Pakistan, she mysteriously disappeared along with her three children. The Pakistani government denied any knowledge about her whereabouts. After 5 years in 2008, it was confirmed by the Pakistani and US intelligence agencies that Aafia has been arrested in Ghazni, Afghanistan, and transferred to an American jail as a prisoner number 650, where she faced a court trial by the US on charges of terrorism.

Aafia’s disappearance and later “capture” in Afghanistan prompted multiple narratives. According to her sister Fouzia, a neurologist teaching in Karachi, Aafia was travelling to meet her relatives in Islamabad, and was kidnapped by the US and Pakistani intelligence agencies and forcefully kept in Afghanistan by the US security agencies for five years. According to the US media and government, she was the “lady Al-Qaida”, one of FBI’s most wanted woman post-9/11. This narrative suggests that she was a high-profile terrorist who was involved with Al-Qaida, went to the US for 10 days in 2003 not

Islamic and Secular Perspective in Gender Politics in Pakistan: Exploring Diversity in Ideologies and practices of Jamaat-e-Islami and NGOs

for a job interview but to facilitate terrorist activities. Afterwards, she moved to Afghanistan because of her connections with Al-Qaida and when she was arrested by the US army, she opened fire on them by snatching their weapons. No matter which narrative we take, we know that Aafia's story appeared in the headlines of the US and Pakistani media when she was tried and later sentenced for 86 years of imprisonment in 2010.

In national discourse, unlike Malala whose suffering has created some sympathies but at the same time whose success has created many hostilities,²⁷ the case of Aafia in mainstream local understanding is portrayed as an instance of injustice to ordinary people of Pakistan by Western powers. It shows that nobody is safe, and at the same time, intelligence agencies and governments can shape the narrative about a person's life. Aafia's case is supported by the illegal abduction of thousands of people in Pakistan, who are known as "missing people". As the Aafia's case had anti-Western elements, JI and many other religious organization actively organized public demonstrations and built their political stance around her. They blamed the government for handing over a Pakistani citizen to American intelligence agencies. They negated all claims from the American government for accusing her as a supporter of terrorists.

Aafia's family and JI were not the only major supporters of Aafia's, some international journalist such as Yvonne Maryam Ridley has criticized the United States' treatment with Aafia during detention. Ridley has claimed that US allegations against Aafia are baseless.²⁸ The newly elected Prime Minister, Imran Khan, has also stressed the release of Aafia during his political campaigns.²⁹ In 2013, there was a time when the US Government and the Pakistani Government was planning a prisoner exchange—Aafia for Shakil Afridi, a person who helped CIA to hunt down Osama Bin Laden. Afridi is undoubtedly a hero for American, but in Pakistan he is sentenced for 33 years under the allegation of his links to a banned militant group.³⁰ The prisoner swap has not yet happened, and Aafia stays in a maximum-security prison in Fort Worth, Texas.

With the case of Aafia, the paper does not make a point that whether she was an innocent dupe or a terrorist. The point to emphasize is that according to many, and particularly by JI and other religious organizations, Aafia is a true "daughter of the nation". All demonstrations had created a sympathetic reaction towards the case of Aafia, and as discussed before, she is considered a symbol of resistance against imperial West. When it was asked to JI women that Malala has brought the Nobel Prize to Pakistan, a vision for girls' education and women freedom, what Aafia did? The answer was that she has sacrificed her life in waking up a sleeping nation. They also told that the case of Aafia is also the case of every Pakistani, who is directly or indirectly oppressed under the Western imperialistic interventions.

There were multiple demonstrations on Aafia Siddiqui, organized by JI women in which they demanded Aafia's release and spoke to the media at length on the

²⁷ Michael Kugelman, "Why Pakistan Hates Malala," Foreign Policy, accessed August 8, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/08/15/why-pakistan-hates-malala/>

²⁸ Declan Walsh, "The Mystery of Dr Aafia Siddiqui," The Guardian, accessed August 6, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/nov/24/aafia-siddiqui-al-qaida>

²⁹ Noman Ansari, "Aafia Siddiqui vs Malala Yousufzai," The Express Tribune, accessed August 15, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/579657/aafia-siddiqui-vs-malala-yousufzai/>

³⁰ "US Conditions for Release of Dr Aafia Unacceptable: PTI," The Express Tribune, accessed August 6, 2018, <https://tribune.com.pk/story/579962/uss-conditions-for-release-of-aafia-unacceptable-shireen-mazari/>

issue. In some protests, Aafia's sister joined them, and in other, some other religious organizations. For JI women workers, Aafia was a true daughter of the nation, one who stood for the whole nation, and her capture was the confinement of whole Pakistan's identity and dignity by the West. She was considered the honor of the whole nation, and when the Musharraf's government handed her over to CIA, it was later defined as the sale of one's own daughter for money. JI fiercely argued that it is a matter of extreme shame that Pakistani authorities gave their own "daughter" to the West to suffer pain and greater suffering. They argued by hinting towards media reports that Aafia imprisonment involves large scale cruel treatment. This attack on the nation's honor was also considered an attack on all men's masculinity. And one of the JI women workers conveyed her frustration and said, "All men in our country are impotent (*na-mard*), otherwise who would allow strangers to take away their daughter." The symbolism of effeminacy, shame, and loss of honor has special connotation in the Pakistani middle-class culture, where men are always considered hard, strong, brave, and courageous, and are expected to protect their women from outsiders. Therefore, JI women workers associated the figure of Aafia with the norms of honour (*izzat*) and masculinity (*mardangi*) and is also an attempt to goading the Pakistani government as well the public towards the issue.

The overall argument of JI, though stemming from their anti-American agenda, was to condemn the Pakistani government for their lack of initiatives for the suffering of Muslim woman. JI women workers suggested that Aafia was targeted because of her association with Islam. For them, American and European media did not support Aafia because she was entirely different from their standards of womanhood. Even in such circumstances, JI women workers applauded the resistance of Aafia, and considered her a source of inspiration for all Pakistani Muslim women. Through the case of Aafia, JI women workers presented an ideal Muslim woman who is modern and educated but Islamic, and who is living in the US but not pro to US values. For them, the question was not whether Aafia had any links with terrorists or not, but the question was why a Muslim woman was suffering by the hands of infidels? As Aafia "is an international 'symbol American injustice' and 'another example of US government's highhandedness' towards Pakistan,"³¹ her case helped JI in creating public consensus over American's image as evil especially for women. Thus, the case of Aafia, her association with Islam and Hijab helped JI to invoke emotional support among many urban middle-class families and strengthened their anti-west ideology.

Contrary to JI, NGOs response and involvement towards the case of Aafia was very limited. They did not discuss her in public or on the media, and there were hardly any protests in support of Aafia's release. During interviews, some NGO women workers though condemned the American treatment with Aafia under human right concerns, but this point was never raised in any of their report or in public speaking. Even during interviews, many women showed their displeasure to speak on Aafia's topic and presented generalized arguments. For instance, when Sania was asked about Aafia, she commented, "We are always active to highlight human rights concerns and where ever they are violated, we strongly condemn them." When asked specifically about "women rights", and "women suffering", most of the NGO women workers avoided to comment.

³¹ Caron Gentry. "The mysterious case of Aafia Siddiqui: Gothic intertextual analysis of neo-Orientalist narratives." *Millennium* 45, no. 1 (2016): 3-24.

Some even commented that because there are some major conspiracy theories attached with Aafia's case, it is not easy to judge her as innocent or accused.

NGOs women workers did not find Aafia with nationalism or Islam. They did not consider that she was targeted because of her Muslim or Pakistani identity, as Sania argued, "In Western countries, there are women in hijab, some are more religious than she was." For her, to associate the case of Aafia with "an attack on all the Muslims in the world" was not a right conclusion to be drawn from this incident. She argued that women's freedom existed more in the West than in Pakistan, however, some religious parties use her case to provoke anti-American sentiments and to fulfil pro-extremist agendas in Pakistan.

NGOs workers neither fully supported the narrative presented by Aafia's family nor completely denied the American narrative. Some NGO women workers related this with the problem of funding, "if we start speaking against our donors (hinting America and USAID), then who will fund us to carry out our activities in Pakistan,"? an NGO worker told on the condition of hiding her name and age. The person concluded, "Sometimes moral standards have to be compromised for larger goals." As many of NGOs in Pakistan survive on international funding, going against their donor countries was the least of their concern. Most of these were funded to highlight the miserable condition of women living in the "Third World" countries, and to emulate living condition of Western women. They were not, in any way, expected to question women's condition in the West.

Discussion:

The debate of JI and NGOs about the "daughter of the nation" allows them to advocate women rights. As the above ethnographic section showed, JI women workers support Aafia, while NGOs considered Malala as a true role model for Pakistani women. It was clear that any person with Western and especially American support was suspicious for JI. Anti-Americanism is one of the JI's major political ideology. On the other hand, NGOs were expected to not question American policies—a major source of their funding. It appears that the fight for rights of women is more political in Pakistan. Both JI, and NGOs set their strategy in a way to speak for some and take refuge for the other. The reason of such a selective response is their already constructed ideologies about women that allows them to selectively stand for woman—who can better secure their interests, represent their ideologies and strengthened their claims.

In JI's ideology, womanhood must be seen in relational context where a woman must find her role, status and even rights in tracing her position to other relations and realities. For them, woman is a delicate and precious gift of God. She is either a daughter, a wife, a sister, or a mother – all relations inspired purity and appreciated within Islam. In their understanding, there is no point to see women in individual role. While defining "woman", they signaled towards the set and predetermined attributes. For instance, a woman, for JI workers, is a symbol of modesty, which means that she should be obedient to her family, reserved while talking to strangers and restraint in taking her decisions. According to this view, women are naturally capable of being obedient, loving, forgiving and patient.

Contrary to JI, NGO women workers understand women in relation with patriarchy and religion where they criticized both for women's inferior status in the society. In NGOs' larger understanding, women are the victims. Though they often

quoted exceptional women in their discussions such as Mother Teresa or Ms. Fatima Jinnah, their politics majorly revolved around the women who have gone through some kind of suffering (as we see above in the case of Malala Yousafzai). The walls of NGOs offices were usually covered with multiple posters of women, with captions describing their misery. One such figure was Mukhtar Mai, a woman from a South Punjabi village, who was gang raped in honour revenge on the order of her village council. Her rape sparked international outrage, and NGOs took her case to show the misery of all Pakistani women. Under such construction, for them, the crucial issue in the lives of women is to get free from the restrictions imposed by patriarchal norms. For them, women are neither dependent on men, nor bound to have a husband. Thus, they idealized the situation where a woman can live her life individually. They advocated “womanhood” that is neither bound by social expectations nor defined in relational context. For them, the serious problem arises when women’s lives and prospects are explained through religious lens, which in turn provide an opportunity to men to misinterpret religious text and isolate women from the public sphere. They demanded to reinterpret the Quran.³² Thus, where JI see the “ideal woman” as fundamentally relational and do not see religion as conflicting force, NGOs appear to see “the ideal woman” as essentially oppositional who must have ability and courage to fight against the prevailing norms to claim better rights for herself.

Besides their ideological differences on women as mentioned above, they both claimed themselves as the true representatives of Pakistani women. Where NGO women workers saw women as part of larger global world, JI women explained women in an Islamic framework. For NGOs women in Pakistan are global citizen; they should adopt ways that ensure their rights, development, and freedom. The JI women workers stated that a Muslim woman cannot remove *musilmaniyat* “Muslimness” from herself and thus is bound to follow Islamic values. NGOs challenged existing religious and patriarchal norms of society as well as added those personal issues into the public debate that are recognized as private such as sexuality and body rights—this sometimes-created contestations. For instance, when NGOs started public campaigns on marital rape and on sexual violence between spouses, this generated a kind of conflict between personal and public. Because of such practices, NGOs in Pakistan became most vulnerable group who are at great risk of facing abuse and violence. In contrast, JI is more involved in *dawa*³³ activities with their agenda of Islamic modernity—a blend of Islam and modernization. They are closer with community because of their religious affiliation and through the Quranic classes and aim to get their political goals. For instance, they invited women to their Quranic lectures and then slowly convinced them to be part of their organization. Thus, these *dawah* sessions are a strong tool of recruiting new *karkun* (workers) for the organization. In sum, both the women of JI and NGOs are active in exerting their agency by following the set organizational habitus/structural norms learned through variety of prescribed literature, trainings, seminars and workshops. Both are striving hard to be the

³² Richard Antoun. "On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages: A Study in the Accommodation of Traditions" *American Anthropologist* 70, no. 4 (1968): pp. 671-697. See also Fatima Mernissi. *The veil and the male elite: A feminist interpretation of women's rights in Islam*. (New York: Basic books, 1991). Nadia Abu-Zahra, "'On the Modesty of Women in Arab Muslim Villages': A Reply." *American Anthropologist* 72, no. 5 (1970): pp. 1079-1088.

³³ The programs or study circles arranged for *dawah* purpose are known as *dawati* – literally meaning invitatory

champion of women rights and this led them to transform their attitude of looking at women and their lives.

Conclusion:

The article discussed diverse ideologies and practices of NGOs and JI that played a crucial role in their political activism on women. By explaining the ideological differentiations, it examined how NGOs and JI women workers endorse their own version of gender politics—shaped under their defined ideological framework. Though, they both possessed different viewpoints on various issues related to women, they equally strived to engage in the mass politics of women empowerment. This eventually helped both groups to gain a legitimate status in the society. With the cases of Malala Yousafzai and Aafia Siddiqui—the former is a heroic figure to NGOs and the latter to JI—the paper elaborated how cultural rhetoric such as “the daughter of the nation” assisted NGOs and JI to further strengthen and legitimize their status. It discussed that both groups somewhat succeeded in creating a strong discourse for their stance on women issues, however, in doing so they also engaged with their own specific version of gender politics.

In explaining the theme of gender politics, the paper discussed that JI women workers’ association with Islam have provided them an authenticity and authority among local masses and allowed them to utilize this authority to achieve certain organizational goals. For example, they exploited their Islamic affiliation by attracting and recruiting community women to the organization, and later strived to mould and develop their thoughts through *dawah* programs. NGO women workers, on the other hand, faced some basic problems in accessing women from community. They are sometimes considered un-Islamic, Western agents, and neo-liberal actors. Their foreign (Euro-American) funding base and their pro-West stance made them as an unauthentic actor. However, NGOs women workers developed effective and good ties with religious clerics and incorporated them in their mainstream women development initiatives. The political activism of both JI and NGOs involved engagements with Islam to enforce their stance on gender. Thus, they both were ready to be transformed in many ways to make their survival easy and long lasting.

Despite this transformation, the activism of JI and NGOs on women revolves around their predefined goals. This became explicit in my discussion of the case studies of Malala Yousafzai and Aafia Siddiqui. These two cases stand to justify the agenda of each organization in which each of them was interested to adopt the narrative in a way that supported their aims. NGOs supported Malala and took her as the daughter of the nation, whereas JI conceived Aafia as the true face of resistance and determination. Both these groups supported the figure (Malala or Aafia) that would support and strengthen their ideology and further highlight their stance on women issues, sufferings, and inequality. While having diverse position over women, JI and NGOs both engaged in a gender politics, and promote their own particular goals rather grassroots issues of women.

While explaining JI and NGOs’ viewpoints on women, this article does not aim to criticise one for other but explicated different ways in which they articulate their position on women through different political lenses. Women workers of both organizational structures have their specific habitus that further allows them to see things in a defined framework. Thus, no matter they engaged in what way with the ideas related to women, they identified it as the source of happiness, comfort and satisfaction. Their outward stance and actions were diverse, influenced from different

habitus/structure (organizational or family) but gave them equal sense of inward freedom—feeling good and satisfied in utilizing their individual agency.

Acknowledgements:

The authors wish to thank Jamaat-i-Islami and NGOs' women who took part in this study and allowed to carry out this fieldwork (The paper uses pseudonyms to maintain their confidentiality). This article has received an extensive help from insightful comments from Dr Shameem Black, Fellow at Australian National University, who provided her valuable suggestions on the larger work from which this paper is based. Thanks also to the generous funding from the Department of Anthropology, Quaid-i-Azam University, Islamabad and Higher Education Commission Pakistan for allowing Zara to spend time in Australian National University work on this project. Finally, we wish to thank our colleagues and friends. Zara thanks Muhammad A. Kavesh for a critical reading of this paper, and her lovely daughter, Serosh Zaynab, for being a part of this writing process.