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The *Sharīʿah* and the Muslim Feminists' Public Display of the Female Body

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Abstract

Muslim feminists in Muslim societies have become increasingly independent and visible professionals in the modern world. They are visible in the public space, especially in the entertainment industry, as they use global information technology to project themselves and their bodies. This brings to the fore the question of how Muslim women negotiate Islamic teachings over the visibility of their bodies. Few studies have interrogated this question in the light of Islamic teachings, hence, the need for this study. This paper aims at a detailed examination of the public visibility of Muslim feminists in the light of the *Sharīʿah* rulings on the public visibility of the male and female bodies. Laura Mulvey's Hollywood Theory on entertainment spectatorship, as used in her "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," is adopted as the theoretical framework to engage the notions of the lustful male gaze and women's erotic power of *fitnah* as prevalent in Islamic discourse. In addition, secondary data drawn from extant literature, interviews, and internet sources are used to interrogate the discourse of five purposively selected Muslim feminists in the context of the *Sharīʿa**h*** rulings on the erotic power of women and their public visibility. The paper concludes that while Islamic teachings discourage the culture of public nudity by both the male and females, the inequitable treatment of Muslim feminists regarding their public appearance is at variance with the above *Sharīʿah* rulings.

Keywords: Muslim feminists, Muslim women's visibility, *Khulwah, ʿawrah*, *Ḥijāb*

INTRODUCTION

The conditions of Muslim feminists in Muslim societies are changing fast as they become increasingly independent, visible, and economically powerful (Inglehart, 2017). The entertainment industry, in particular, has made them more independent, powerful, and prominent as they gain control of the public sphere. In discussing the dramatic entrance of Muslim women into the public entertainment space, this paper focuses on Muslim feminists and not Islamic feminists. Islamic feminists differ from Muslim feminists in their engagement with Islamic teachings. Though many scholars such as Cooke employs the term "Islamic feminists" among others for all those who "are doing something about" the threat posed by the "official preoccupation with women's bodies," doing this "sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously" and who "offers a critique of some aspects of" Islamic teachings (Cooke, 2001), there is still the danger of lumping together as Islamic feminists, two separate categories of feminists because they all work to defend women from "Islamic patriarchy," misogynistic traditions and oppressive practices.

The simple reason is that some feminists base their feminist discourse on the Islamic matrix. While they do not question the sanctity of the authentic Al-Qur'an and Sunnah (words and deeds) of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW), which is the basis of Sharīʿah (Islamic law), other feminist discourses are based on a Western and secular matrix that challenges the absolute sources of Islam. It is, therefore, necessary to distinguish between the two feminist categories. Therefore, it has been argued that the formerconsists of Islamic feminists while the latter are Muslim feminists (Uthman, 2013).

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Hence, the latter's feminist activism involves the display of women's bodies in public and the negotiation of the Sharia law over their public appearance and performance in Muslim societies. Where private space is generally considered a women's space and public space as a men's space which is the focus of this paper. Data comprising stories of five Muslim feminists on women's public visibility, appearance, and performance were purposively analyzed to study the discourse of Muslim feminists because these women, in the view of the author, best represent the Muslim feminist discourse as explained above. At the same time, it must be noted that many Muslim male feminists, such as Qasim Amin, widely regarded as the father of Islamic feminism, have advanced Islamic evidence in support of Muslim women's emancipation (Amin, 2004).

In this paper, some critical issues are engaged in detail on the public display of the female body, its projection in the entertainment industry, and the *Sharīʿah* rulings on *Khulwah, ʻAwrah,* and *Ḥijāb* as interpreted by Islamic scholars, which have been briefly discussed in a recent paper (Uthman, 2021). This term, Islamic scholars, is used throughout this paper to refer to experts on core Islamic sciences such as *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), *Tafsīr* (exegesis), and *Ḥadīth* (Prophetic sayings) but not Muslim scholars that may refer to Muslim experts in various fields such as history, language, and sociology).

Though several studies have examined the public visibility of Muslim feminists, none has seriously engaged in detail the *Sharīʿah* rulings and the notions of the lustful male gaze, women's erotic power of *fitnah,* and the Islamic concepts of *Khulwah, ʻAwrah* and *Ḥijāb*. In addition, not much has been done in interrogating the stories of the five Muslim feminists chosen for study in line with these *Sharīʿah* rulings (Bawa, 2017; Glas & Alexander, 2020; Grine & Saeed, 2017). Owing to this gap, the objectives of this study are to examine the selected stories of Muslim feminists and the extent to which they conform to the *Sharīʿah* rulings on the visibility of the body in the public space.

RESEARCH METHOD

The paper analyzes how ***Sharīʿah*** and Muslim Feminist Public Views about the Women's Body are conceptualized in the context of discourse analysis. This study uses a descriptive method to interpret the available secondary data about five Muslim feminists collected intentionally from the existing literature, interview reports, and the internet by looking at the phenomena with the purposive sampling method (Urquhart, 2012).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Sharīʿah rulings on the Public Visibility of the Female

The contestations over the visibility of the female body in the public space, especially in the entertainment industry in many Muslim societies, revolve around the ***Sharīʿah*** rulings on *Khulwah, ʻAwrah,* and *Ḥijāb*. These concepts, in reality, generally affect both male and female bodies. *Khulwah*, as I have recently explained, denotes the seclusion of the female and male individuals who are non-*Maḥram* persons (with whom marriage is permissible) without the presence of a *Maḥram* relation with whom marriage is not permissible in a place where an opportunity exists for sexual intercourse. *Khulwah* is prohibited based on the divine command to believing males and females to restrain their lustful and erotic gaze from looking at the opposite sex with desire and guard their private parts (Qur'an 24: 30-31). Therefore, in reality, the prohibition pertains to all sexes (Uthman, 2021).

While the above rulings on *Khulwah* are used as evidence by some to claim that "Islam recognizes the domestic, private realm as the female sphere and the public realm is seen as the male world" and consequently "preclude any public performance, and even appearance, of a Muslim woman, especially where non-*Maḥram* males are present" (Adamu, 2017), this view, however, totally negates the rulings. The regulations or rulings are first directed at men before women (Qur'an 24: 30). This, as I have explained, might be due to the ferocity of the male aggression towards their female in terms of sexual pursuits.

Furthermore, I argue that if the rulings truly prohibit any public performance and appearance as claimed by some scholars, then it means both the male and the female are prohibited from public visibility as the commandments are given to the two to be carried out in the public space. This only goes to prove that both are permitted to occupy the same universe of the public, and the assertions or notions that male and female bodies should be treated unequally in respect of public visibility because both are not the same biologically contradicts the clear rulings in the above verses and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet, the second source of the *Sharīʿah*. This second source also endorses females' public visibility as documented at the time of the Prophet (Uthman, 2021). Therefore, the thrust of the argument is that the inequitable way the male and female bodies are treated by some Islamic scholars and in some Muslim societies contradicts the *Sharīʿah*.

Likewise, another ***Sharīʿah*** ruling that is used to annul female public appearance and performance is '*Awrah*, which refers to the parts of the human body, whether male or female, that the ***Sharīʿah*** requires to be covered in front of the opposite sex and are therefore regarded as *Ḥarām* (forbidden) to be exposed in different contexts. These include male to male (MTM), male to female (MTF), female to male (FTM), and female to female (FTF). Generally, the scope of '*Awrah* of MTF concerning non-*Maḥram* is what is between his navel and his knee. The FTM concerning her non-*Maḥram* is her entire body except her face and hands, while to MTM, FTF, and *Maḥram* relations, the '*Awrah* varies according to the various schools of the *Sharīʿah* (Qaraḍāwī, 1984). However, other opinions on the concepts include those of the late Muftī (Official Grand Head of the Council of Islamic Jurists) of Saudi Arabia, Shaykh 'Abdul 'Aziz ibn Bās, his successor, late Shaykh Muḥammad ibn Ṣaliḥ al-'Uthaymīn and late Mawlana Abul'ala Mawdudi, the founder of the Islamic movement in Pakistan.

Ibn Bās, al-'Uthaymīn, al-'Uthaymīn, and most Islamic jurists in Saudi Arabia endorse the 1979 *fatwā* (Islamic legal verdict) that prohibits women from engaging in "inappropriate" professions such as secretarial and administrative works; the the1981 *fatwā* that forbids contact between a female and a *non-Maḥram* in the workplace, ensures that her job is "similar to" the one "within the home" and directs proprietors of restaurants to offer separate spaces for males and females including family members; as well as the 1990 *fatwā* that prohibits women from driving (until recently. This, according to them, are all in accordance with the rulings on *Khulwah* and '*Awrah* as they serve the objectives of preventing females from *Khulwah* and exposing their '*Awrah* in the presence of *non-Maḥram* males. For Mawdudi, the rulings on Khulwah and 'Awrah prove that the *Sharīʿah* prescribes female exclusion from the public space. Therefore, the female sphere of activity should be restricted to the domestic space, where grown-up non-*Maḥram* men are excluded because the sex instinct is capable of ruining the human race and should be prevented from running reckless through the seclusion of females in the house or veiling their entire body before *non-Maḥram* males when they go out. To Mawdudi, therefore, the females are not granted equipotential rights to those of males and can therefore only go out under extreme necessity (Uthman, 2021).

Though these Islamic scholars consider the face and two hands not part of the female ' *Awrah*, they still insist that females should be veiled in the public space because of the fear of *fitnah* (seduction). This is

a point seriously debunked by the late, leading Islamic scholar of Ḥadīth Shaykh al-Albānī. To him, this view is totally at variance with the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW), the precedents of his companions, and the opinions of the majority of Islamic scholars. The remedy to the fear of *fitnah that* can be found in the Qur'an and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW), according to him, is the above *Sharīʿah* rulings, and he quoted copious references to prove that this remedy does not entail the seclusion or total veiling of women. The *Sharīʿah, therefore,* does not hold the females responsible for their erotic power of *fitnah* but rather prohibits the male lustful erotic gaze at the curves of the female body. It also does not seek to control female sexuality by outlawing the visibility of their bodies and physical appearance in public. This inequitable position contradicts the society of the Prophet Muḥammad (SAW), where Muslim women, in general, continued to make public appearances and performances in different spheres Al-Albānī, 1389 cited in Uthman (2021).

While still on the perception of the female *fitnah* in respect of the male, it is apposite to point to what Laura Mulvey has termed Hollywood "voyeuristic" and "fetishistic" or "two distinct modes of the male gaze" of the 1950s and 1960s. However, it can be argued that both of them are today "voyeuristic" and "fetishistic." The Hollywood characters and erotic figures on screen in the prevailing global entertainment apparatus show that all sexes are the objects of desire of lustful gaze as the film industry puts the audience and spectators in different subject positions, in the view of Mulvey, as actors have coded objects with "to-be-looked-at-ness" for the satiation of the viewers (Mulvey & Pleasure, 1975). It is therefore clear that the revolution in the entertainment industry today projects both the male and lustful female gaze in line with the Freudian infantile scopophilia (the erotic pleasure derived from secretly looking at other people's bodies) through the darkness of the film house, the comfort of private homes or even portable laptops, android phones and tablets that provide viewers erotic avenues to view erotic bodies of actors on-screen (Mulvey & Pleasure, 1975).

Since it is in the name of the lustful male gaze that most of the rights of women in Islam have been curtailed by some Islamic scholars who, according to Nawal El-Sadawi, (the Egyptian women's rights activist), "seek to protect men from the *fitnah* of women" and thereby preclude any female public performance and even appearance, many studies have shown that it is the fear of the erotic power of *fitnah* on the male that is at the root of women's problems in Muslim societies.

This was the case in Taliban Afghanistan, which vigorously enforced women's total veiling and segregation. "One of their first acts" in Afghanistan when the Taliban took over power on September 27, 1996, was to rule that "women must be covered and" could "no longer work in government offices" (Cooke, 2001). Similarly, in Khomeini's Iran, women were to "be covered" in conformity with the "accepted" and "preferred" style, size, and color. In Saudi Arabia, even non-Muslim women must wear the veil in public (Gabriel & Hannan, 2011). This extreme view of the veil was taken to the height of absurdity when fifteen Saudi female students died in a fire outbreak in their school hostel in March 2002 because the "vice police" enforced their extreme view of the 'virtue' of the veil by preventing the 'male' firefighters from saving the young girls (Lazreg, 2009, pp. 5-6) confirming Amin's argument on the destructive impact of the Ḥijāb on the "stunted" growth of pubescent girls (Amin, 2004, p. 48).

It is such experiences as the above Saudi case that brings to the fore the need for the Algerian novelist-historian Assia Djebar to use fictional female transmitters to recreate the female "voices" of women at the time of the Prophet (Hazel, 2019). For there is a great need to use Islamic teachings to recreate the female "voices" and activism of women today as it happened at the time of the Prophet and throughout Islamic history until recently; the wives of the Prophet, his daughters, and other females had always told and owned almost entirely their own stories and activism . They had always been active in all

spheres of the public space as they engaged and wielded political, religious, and economic powers, among others, and consequently refused to be restricted to any separate domestic space even though some chose to wear the veil (Uthman, 2013). In short, females in Islamic history were not always "quietly submissive subalterns, hidden from the public eye," as claimed by many today (Cooke, 2001).

Though the *Ḥijāb* is commonly employed today as a generic form of both *Khulwah* and *'Awrah*, which derive their references from it, this is at variance with what permeates the literature where it specifically refers to the dressing and comportment of the wives of the Prophet as contained in the Qur'an (Q33: 53) and as clarified by the majority of Islamic scholars such as al-Qardawi, a contemporary leading Islamic jurist and al-Albānī, the late foremost expert on Ḥadīth who pioneered the teaching of the subject at the International Islamic University, Medina. For other Muslim adult females, their dressing is the *Jilbāb* (loose-fitting, non-transparent outer garment covering the whole body except the hands and face) and the Khimār (head scarf that also covers the ears, neck, and bosom). Specifically, because *Ḥijāb* derives its reference from the Qur'an and is restricted to wives of the Prophet (SAW), most Islamic scholars view it as unobligatory for all females Al-Albānī, 1389 cited in Uthman (2021).

Here, it must also be mentioned that the objective of female dressing and comportment is not the fear of misbehavior, mistrust, or erotic power of *fitnah* but protecting "them from lecherous evil men" that lust after them (Qaraḍāwī, 1984). This purpose is confirmed by the divine verses that "they may be recognized and not be molested" (Q33: 59) and "Do not be seductive in speech, lest one in whose heart there is a disease should lust after you" (Q33: 32).

The above objective may explain why many women today choose to wear the *Niqāb* (the face covering), which is gaining popularity in many countries, including Britain and the United States. Among both Muslims and non-Muslims, some of whom "use it out in the streets or other situations with strange males" and say that they "enjoy wearing it (Scott-Baumann, 2012). Shayla Scarf, a non-Muslim, embraced the *Ḥijāb* because she was tired of the "imbalanced American culture" of female nudity and obsession with sex. To her, the *Ḥijāb* offers her "protection from unwanted looks" even as she sees it as a source of beauty. She defends its use as a symbol of protection from the sick and impregnating male arousal. This, for her, is a big leap at female liberty and equality since she could freely walk on the streets, knowing that she has denied such men their sick arousal and cured their alluring hearts (Shayla Scarf qouted in Lazreg, 2009, p. 84).

Thus, while wearing the *Ḥijāb* has been attacked by many Muslim feminists, it has been found to be liberating for many women. One such Muslim feminist is Wadud, who wears *Ḥijāb* as part of her "more public participation or public engagements, business meetings, community affairs and interfaith forums" and removes it when gardening, running errands, and after a conference "to avoid a rigid stigma" (Wadud, 2013). Another Muslim feminist, Fatima Mernissi (1991 and 1994), also views the *Ḥijāb* as severely restricting (Roded, 2015). This point is highly significant as many Muslim women are modern, faithful, and committed to the Islamic principles of *Khulwah, 'Awrah,* and *Ḥijāb* and are at the same time visible with their *Ḥijāb* in the public space. They include the above young educated British women reclaiming the *Ḥijāb* contrary to the views of Muslim feminists such as Asma Barlas (2019).

Therefore, it may be in place to re-echo that the current ban of the veil in some parts of Europe challenges modern conceptions of agency, freedom of religion, and feminism for the many Muslim women who are committed to the Islamic teachings on *Khulwah and 'Awrah* and *Ḥijāb*. This paper now turns to the stories of five Muslim feminists.

Selected Stories of Muslim Feminists and Public Performance

This section discusses the new dramatic and revolutionary appearance and performance of five women who fall under the category of Muslim feminists discussed in this paper and who are contesting the traditional roles of Muslim women in their attempts to reshape and reinterpret the popular notion of Muslim female nonappearance and nonperformance in the public space using Western secular matrices. These Muslim feminists are focused because they are the ones most clearly recreating, reimagining, and reimaging alternative realities about Muslim women's economic power, professions, and roles, among others, in the public space (Cook-Huffman & Snyder, 2018). These women were deliberately chosen because their credentials as feminists are not open to question, but their claims of being practicing Muslims are at times open to question by the Islamic religious authorities in Muslim societies.

The first example of contestation and personal reinterpretation of Muslim female visibility in the public space is presented by the story of Saeeda Vorajee (nicknamed Sahara Knite), who deliberately chose to be the first openly Muslim female pornographic star in 2009. Although an Indian-born British citizen, she had been brought up by strict Muslim parents from the Indian State of Gujarat (Pusey, 2016). Interestingly, she was said to have submitted herself to the wearing of the *Ḥijāb* as a young girl in conformity to both Islamic teachings and her family's conservative Islamic traditions. When her involvement in the pornographic industry was brought to the notice of her parents by a male cousin who saw her on a UK pornography channel, she was disowned. Sahara, however, maintained that she was deeply Islamic when she declared as follows:

> "I'm an Indian Muslim girl from Gujarat. My parents moved to London in the 1960s. My family is very conservative, but I grew up as a rebel. But, let me tell you, what I do for a living doesn't dictate who I am. I get hate mails by the dozen; every day, people call me to say: they want to kill me or they'll shoot me. But I'm not ashamed of myself. I've been working in the adult industry for two years now, and I love what I do. I don't hide under pretenses (Knite, 2009)".

Thus, her story reveals how the globalizing revolution in cinematic, information and communication technology is aiding these Muslim feminists to redefine themselves as the Satellite Television channel provided her with her new freedom and identity as a porn star. Some of the questions that could be asked from her above subversive attitude to her conservative family morality include: Is Sahara the emblematic feminist reinterpreting the Islamic injunctions on *Khulwah, ʿAwrah,* and *Ḥijāb* through the interpellation of Islamic religious authorities, and is she doing so on behalf of other Muslim women? By referring to how her "parents moved to London in the 1960s," was she indirectly holding them complicit in the influence of westernization on her new identity as a Muslim woman?

Sahara, by insisting on being "an Indian Muslim girl from Gujarat" and that "what I do for a living doesn't dictate who I am;" brings her faith and Islamic commitment into her feminist discourse to counteract those opposed to her appearance and performance in the entertainment industry as a pornographic star. This proves her feminist convictions that what she does with her body should not define her faith as a Muslim woman. In short, she is attempting to redefine what makes a person a Muslim. By alluding to the movement of her parents to London, Sahara also calls attention to the liberty of the West, which unveils her. This signifies how the West helps her to act under her power or free agency in choosing to be a porn star and gives herself what could be regarded as a kind of distinctive religious modern identity when she says, "I'm not ashamed of myself. I've been working in the adult industry for two years now and I love what I do. I don't hide under pretenses" (Adamu, 2017). Put differently, she is declaring that as a

Muslim woman, she has a choice not to cover her '*awrah* and wear the *Ḥijāb* because she might not be interested in controlling the men's lust.

Sahara's feminist view is similar to that of Veena Malik. Born Zahida Malik, a Pakistani actress, model, singer, and comedienne, Veena, who had worked for ten years in news serials and films between Pakistan and India, caused outrage among Islamic circles in Pakistan for appearing in a nude shoot for a December 2011 edition of FHM India magazine. It was the first for a Pakistani female and a Muslim woman. While defending her nude roles in the entertainment media, Veena insisted that she was not the first entertainer to appear nude and asked why all the fuss. According to her, "If you look at the industry… there are various examples of such shoots. it's not that I am the first one who has done it. Why is sexuality such a big problem? Are we grown up? Are we still living in the jungles?" (BBC, 2012).

Veena's case shows another aspect of Muslim women who have positioned themselves as Muslim feminists. They tend to share a rhetorical stance as they draw on various arguments to construct a critique of the *Sharīʿah* rules on *Khulwah*, *'Awrah,* and *Ḥijāb*. She is thus changing the Islamic understanding of the concepts of the invisibility of the *'Awrah* by raising questions of double gender standards. Her above statements "there are various examples of such shoots" and "it's not that I am the first one who has done it" are therefore pointing at what one can describe as the "interplay between the female body, gender inequality and Islam" as her male partners in the display of nudity in the entertainment media are not subjects of condemnation.

Like Sahara, her rhetorical questions: "are we actually grown up? Are we still living in the jungles?" might also be examining the limits to secular feminist accommodation in a Muslim society the same way Marcus Braybrooke has examined "the limits to religious accommodation in a secular state" (Uthman, 2013). She might be an anomaly in Muslim societies but certainly not in the global space. Whereas many Muslim societies represent radical segregation and public invisibility of women, especially in the entertainment media, Western secular space projects unveiled naked women, particularly in the film industry, where female characters are positioned to be gazed at and desired by the male audience. Compared with the British women referred to earlier who are committed to the Islamic teachings on *Khulwah* and *Awrah*. And are even proud of wearing *Ḥijāb*. These statements reveal the genuine opposing opinions of Muslim feminists.

The story of twenty-three-year-old Tunisian activist Amina Sboui who in March 2013 posted nude pictures of her breasts, provides another example of a Muslim feminist. The immediate reaction to her topless visual display was that of Imam Almi Adel, who gave a *fatwā* declaring that as a result of her violation of the *Sharīʿah* rulings on the *Ḥijāb,* Amina should be punished with a hundred lashes and stoning to death. Following this *fatwā*, a feminist activist group called FEMEN organized what it called the International Topless Jihad Day, during which young women with different slogans painted on their nude breasts protested in front of several mosques and Tunisian embassies in different European countries. To press home their point, some of the protesters burnt what they called an Islamist symbol, a flag that represents *Tawhīd* (the Islamic belief in the oneness of God) that stood adjacent to the grand mosque in Paris. In reaction to this FEMEN's action, a Facebook group, Muslim Women Against FEMEN, was formed to articulate Muslim women's dissatisfaction with FEMEN's brand of feminism as well as their view of the *Ḥijāb* as an Islamic symbol of the identity of Muslim women (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Colpean, 2020).

That Amina's action became a subject of contention when Imam Adel gave his *fatwa* on her could therefore be understood against the background of Muslim societies such as Northern Nigeria (Pierri & Barkindo, 2016), where the *Ḥisbah* popularly known as the *Sharīʿah* "police" analogous to the Saudi "vice police" aims at promoting what is good and preventing what is bad by stopping the exposure of the female

body and regulating singing and dancing in the public spaces (Adamu, 2017). However, while Imam Adel gave his infamous *fatwā* based on the argument that Amina violated the *Sharīʿah* injunctions for *Zinā* (illicit sex) and therefore deserved the punishments of a hundred lashes and stoning to death, yet the crime of *Zinā* falls under *al-Ḥudūd* (fixed) punishments that are almost impossible to execute because of the stringent conditions attached to the conviction of a person. Most importantly, it is instructive that the punishment in the *fatwā* is prescribed for *Zinā* and not the posting of nude pictures, which is not part of the *al-Ḥudūd* (Uthman, 2014).

In the same vein, Amina represents a Muslim feminist who is positioning herself as a victim of gender inequality and Islamic patriarchy in a globalizing world. This, I believe, is an indication that the efficacy of the Muslim feminist discourse will depend largely on the ability to learn to exploit the changing opportunities in the global society even while appearing to be passive, as there is no record of Amina praising her perceived intransigence or any rebellious countering of the *fatwā*. This ability enabled Amina to employ the new technology that empowered her in a way many women had not thought of before now. With modern recording and filming technology, Amina's private topless chest provides erotic entertainment in the public space. Therefore, she is emblematic of Muslim feminists who believe that the real threat to women's rights comes from those elements in the Muslim societies, which in the guise of defending the *Sharīʿah* limit women's performance while defining what kind of professions women should engage in.

The story of Maryam Basir, an actress from New York 2013, provided another daring story of a Muslim feminist when she became the first Muslim female bikini model. Despite her skimpy appearance on catwalks and fashion shoots in glossy magazines and advertisements, in her interview with the CNN, Maryam declared that:

> "I've met models raised in Muslim homes but said they are no longer Muslim. That's not who I am. I pray five times a day. I fast on Ramadan and celebrate the holidays. I go to the mosque for Juma [sic] prayers on Fridays. I give zakat (a required percentage of income to charity). I don't drink alcohol or use drugs. It was important to me to marry a Muslim. And I plan on making a haj, inshallah. I'm aware that I'm not a perfect Muslim. But I believe that Allah is not judgmental (Chafets, 2013)".

Like Sahara above, Maryam brings her faith and commitment as a Muslim into her feminist discourse by drawing on her symbolic practice of Islam, such as praying five times a day, fasting in Ramadan, and giving the compulsory alms in Islam to defend her rejection of the rules on *Khulwah, ʿAwrah* and *Ḥijāb*. This presents her as negotiating the appearance and performance of the female bodies in the entertainment industry. By employing her performance of Islamic sanctioned rituals to support her female agency, independence, and performance, she foregrounds the debate over their display of the female body in the public space between the divine and the mundane, the sacred and the profane, the permitted and the forbidden. The need to increasingly justify the female public appearance and performance against the condemnation of the Muslim societies is also the focus of the last story of Rahama Sadau, one of the most successful and glamorous Hausaactors.

Rahama featured in a music video titled: "I Love You" with Barnabas Buba Luka (nicknamed Classiq), a Christian Rapper from the northern State of Bauchi, Nigeria, where she acted in a series of intimate scenes with the Rapper as they locked and held hands while hugging each other in September 2016. On 2nd[d] October 2016, she was expelled from the Hausa film industry by the Motion Picture Practitioners' Association of Nigeria (MOPPAN) for her amoral appearance in a music video where she appeared in a series of visuals hugging and cuddling with Classiq (Kwasu, 2019). Though she promptly

accepted the decision and apologized, Sadau participated in a panel discussion on "Art, Activism and the Northern Narrative" almost a year later during the Kaduna Book and Arts Festival. While responding to her ban by MOPPAN, she railed at the misogynist penalty:

> "I am fierce. I believe time will change things. Things like this happen because I am a woman. There was nothing in that video. I don't regret anything I did that has to do with my craft or my art because it is a completely different person from who I am. I don't let my religion come in the way of my profession actually (Kwasu, 2019)".

She stated further:

> "People in the north are fond of linking religion and entertainment, which have nothing to do with each other. They are two different things. I have no regret in demonstrating my passion in any of my crafts, and religion is a thing of the mind (Kwasu, 2019)".

Sadau unequivocally rejected and countered the unacceptable Hausa Muslim double gender standards over the visibility of male and female bodies in the film industry. She also lamented over how she was made the face of rebellion in the industry, which had affected her family such that her father, an Imam, had been stoned because of her role in a movie. She again challenged how MOPPAN banned her over a work of art without being allowed to defend herself.

In short, the Muslim feminists discussed above are protesting the age-long segregation in Muslim public spaces. They are questioning the Islamic authority to delimitate the visibility, appearance, and performance of female bodies in public. Their appearance in the nude as part of their attempts to radically redefine the public perception of the visibility and power of the female bodies, particularly in the film industry. These Muslim feminists, therefore, offer a whole new perspective on the Islamic teachings on the concepts of *Khulwah, ʻAwrah,* and the *Ḥijāb* (which have been adequately discussed in the first part of the paper) as they emphasize their ownership and control of their bodies while reaffirming their faith in Islam. This shows that they are engaging in the interpellation of Islamic authorities to challenge the social norms that rule them out of public appearance in general and entertainment performance in particular.

CONCLUSION

The interpretation of Islamic injunctions on the visibility or otherwise of the female bodies in the paper contrasts the dominant views that preclude Muslim women's public appearance and performance, which have always been based on the views of some Islamic scholars. However, this preclusion has changed in recent times with Muslim feminists such as Sahara, Veena, Amina, Maryam, and Rahama creating new forms of Muslim women's roles and responsibilities that subvert the Islamic prohibition of the lustful erotic gaze and the exposure of the *ʻAwrah* by both the male and the female by situating themselves between Islam, feminism, space, and technology. Though many Muslims are appalled by this development, they tend to ignore the performance and appearance of men in contrast to the Islamic teachings on the lustful erotic gaze discussed in this paper.

The Muslim women feminist stories expose how the revolution in information technology has enabled them to overcome their limiting roles and the invisibility of their bodies in the public space. The revolution has also given increasingly unprecedented power to Muslim feminists in demanding and claiming ownership and authority over the visual display of their bodies. They are contending the use of Islam by Islamic scholars in delimiting the private and public spaces as they pose numerous questions about their new and changing performances in society. As more and more of these Muslim feminists counter the traditional notions of the public space in Muslim societies, more and more Muslim women will

appreciate their abilities to make their own decisions on their bodies and create possibilities for alternative professions and roles for themselves in line with Islamic teachings. All the five women discussed here are Muslims who refuse to submit to the limiting interpretation of Islamic authorities on the injunctions concerning *Khulwah, ʻAwrah,* and *Ḥijāb* in their public appearances and performances.

Though the other side of the discourse on why female bodies should not be displayed represented by Islamic scholars such as Ibn Bās and Mawdudi has been explained, this paper reveals that these scholars have misunderstood the notions of equality and sameness. The paper argues that while these scholars opine that female appearance in the public spaces should be limited or controlled because both men and women are not the same biologically and due to the fear of *fitnah*, the scriptural evidence for this discrimination is very weak. It is this very inequitable treatment of the female body in the name of biology and *fitnah* that this paper sets out to correct with the commandments of *Ghad al-Baṣar* and *Satr al-ʻawrah*.

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