

Review

A re-reading of the Egyptian Zaynab al-Ghazzali, the muslim brotherhood and the islamic feminist movement in contemporary society

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This paper focuses on the activism and feminism of the Egyptian Islamist, Zaynab al-Ghazzālī al-Jubaylī (1918 to 2009) in order to examine how she has thought about Muslim women's roles in both the political and Islamist struggles of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The existing literature while attesting to Zaynab al-Ghazzālī's eminent position in both contemporary Islamic circles and feminist discourses, have failed to show how her feminist activities intersect with that of the Muslim brotherhood. As against the secular gender and feminist postulations of Muslim women like Fatima Mernissi, Ahmed Leila, Assia Djebar and Nawal Sadawi, this paper examines how Zaynab's feminist activism and the organization of the Muslim Brotherhood intersect in their Da'wah approaches and contributions to the revivalism of 'authentic' Islamic feminism in contemporary society. This paper will ground itself upon Zaynab's autobiographical work, *Ayyām min Hayātī* to show how Zaynab and her sisters, using the Muslim brotherhood's struggles, were able to employ the Islamist female agency even under the unfavourable brutal regime of the then Egyptian President, Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir (1375 to 1390/1956 to 1970).

Key words: Zaynab al- Ghazzālī, authentic islamic feminism, Egypt, Muslim brotherhood, female agency.

INTRODUCTION

The significance of this study lies in the fact that it considers the way a contemporary female Islamist, political and feminist activist, Zaynab al-Ghazzālī al-Jubaylī (1918 to 2009) and her sisters use the Muslim Brotherhood of Hasan al-Bannā (1324 to 1368/1906 to 1949) for the empowerment of Muslim women as documented in Zaynab's *Ayyām min Hayātī*, her autobiographical narrative where she recorded the struggle of the Muslim Brothers and sisters in the Brotherhood, while reclaiming what this present author has defined elsewhere as the "authentic" Islamic feminism (Uthman, 2005). The focus here, therefore, is a textual cum contextual analysis of Zaynab's text to show how she appropriates Islam to reclaim this "authentic" Islamic feminism in the Muslim sisters' resilience and resistance carried out through the Muslim Brotherhood. Zaynab's conception of Islamic feminism as shown in her autobiographical narrative merits the term "authentic" Islamic feminism as used in this study since her appropriation of Islam in reclaiming the roles played by

Muslim women at the time of the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) is not conceived as a subversive strategy of self-empowerment, undermining Islamic teachings or subverting the power structures of Islamist movements as done by most of the acclaimed contemporary Islamist feminists like Fatima Mernissi, Assia Djebar and Nawal Sadawi. The period that Zaynab wrote her *Ayyām min Hayātī* is particularly instructive because it was after Egypt witnessed a popular nationalist struggle in 1952 that involved all strands of the Egyptian society, the Islamist Muslim brotherhood, the secular feminist union, the Marxist and the Military. The Military sacked the last vestiges of British colonialism, the king, and established a people's republic, albeit through a coup, in which Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir became the major beneficiary. Zaynab also wrote her autobiographical text in 20th Egypt, when the secular feminist movement was already flourishing and Egypt was gradually but vastly coming to terms that a Muslim woman could throw away the veil and come into the public space.

The secular movement was also actively in the nationalist struggle in which Zaynab also became an active participant. Using Zaynab and her sisters' roles in the contemporary Egyptian Islamic movement and nationalist struggles to exemplify the typology of Islamic feminism already articulated by this author and her categorization as the feminist and the feminine by this author elsewhere (Uthman, 2010), borrowing from Showalter (1979), this paper focuses on Zaynab's autobiographical book, *Ayyām min Hayātī* (days from my life). The autobiography, written in Arabic to borrow from Muhammad Bannī (Al-Musawi, 2006), a language that is "loaded with Quranic verses, traditions of the Prophet, laden with slogans and national canticles" makes it possible to examine how Zaynab and other Muslim women like her affirm the Quranic idioms and Islamist slogans in their feminist, nationalist and religious and how they demonstrate the difference between their Islamist brand of feminism and that of secular Muslim women also involved in struggles with regard to Muslim women's religious, educational and political rights. Thus Zaynab's autobiographical feminist text is important because unlike those of the aforementioned Muslim women whom Mariam Cooke (1999) has described with her as Islamic feminists, it emerged within this ambit of popular Islamic discourse and matrices and not within the Muslim secular and liberal discourse and matrices. Though she and her sisters in the brotherhood emerged at a time when the secular feminist school as championed by Hudā (1296 to 1368/1879 to 1947) led feminist union was very strong in Egypt, yet rather than undermining Islam in their struggles for women's freedom and advancement; they became dissatisfied with the union because of its western and secular biases and their conviction that Islam has on its own granted women every strand of political, religious and socio-cultural autonomy while they continued to work with western and secular feminist organizations as noted in 1952 when Zaynab's led Muslim Ladies' Association joined the Women's Committee for Popular Resistance in their nationalist struggles (Hoffman, 1985). This paper stresses and emphasizes the term 'Islamic feminism' in this paper specifically because it refers to Muslim women activists who hold on to what this paper describes later as "triadic" commitment of their faith, nationalism and the feminist struggle rather than the generic term 'Islamic feminism' as used by scholars like Miriam Cooke (Cooke, 2001). Based on this definition, this study elucidates how the Muslim women of the Islamic Brotherhood like Zaynab "who thinks, believes and acts subjectively on her own conviction and in a way that contradicts societal norms," relates to and within Islam, the Islamic way of life and tradition.

Contrary to what is symptomatic of such a woman, Zaynab and her sisters while defying the established social order and resisting their oppression and suppression in the society, do not reject Islamic matrices or circumvent Islamic traditions. They do not suffer from

the "the narcissistic injury" which George (1997) defines as "a wound essentially caused by the anxiety about the superiority of Western civilization" and which is afflicting most of the so-called contemporary Islamic feminists. In short, instead of viewing the popular Islamic gender heritage as a "screen" on which secular feminist vituperations against Islam are predicated, the muslim sisters of the muslim brotherhood subject the Islamic heritage to what was earlier mentioned, calls "scientific/scholarly analysis and reclaims an Islam that supports women in resisting and questioning socio-cultural backgrounds that seek to dominate and oppress them. Whereas, the works of secular Muslim women continue to enjoy popular patronage in mainstream feminist discourse and scholarship as templates for understanding feminism in the Muslim world, the writings of "authentic" Islamic feminist like Zaynab where nationalist, feminist and Islamic motifs cohere remain a rarity. Among the few works on these motifs are my "Feminism in Postmodern Society" (Uthman, 2005) and "A Triadic Re-reading of Zaynab al-Ghazzālī (Uthman, 2010). In short, though Zaynab's feminism has been the focus of some feminist writings, how she deconstructs and dismantles western and secular feminism has remained largely unexamined. This is due largely to the mistaken notion in mainstream feminist analysis of fictional Arabic novels, short stories and poems that give the notion that feminism in the Muslim can only take the form of Islamic liberalism. This has in turn led to "shutting" the "authentic" Islamic feminism away from feminist analysis of Arabic literary texts and hence the Arabic voices of Islamic feminists like Zaynab is not readily available and accessible as those of Mernissi and others. This paper therefore sets out to fill the aforementioned gap as it explores one of the Arabic texts and autobiographical narratives written by committed muslim women who wrote to present and document a unique interface of Islamism, politics and gender in 20th/21st Century Egypt. The paper will show how these subjectivities have been engaged by Muslim women in the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt.

Of particular interest in this paper is the nexus between Islam, political participation and gender empowerment as understood and applied by these Muslim women. Though it is necessary to note here that to what extent the understanding and representation of Muslim women in this text by Zaynab can be regarded as a function of "authentic" Islamic interpretation based on the absolute sources of Islamic Law and how the Muslim Brotherhood has mirrored this understanding may be a matter of debate. However, that the Muslim women of the Muslim Brotherhood have engaged the problematic of the trajectory, ambivalence and expedient inconsistencies of Muslim women political, religious and feminist activism in the Muslim Brotherhood and by extension in the whole of the Muslim World by not undermining Islam is not debatable. Herein lies the justification for labeling their

feminist struggles as “authentic Islamic feminism. Hence, this study will show how the selected Zaynabian text for study represents those Muslim women activists who are prototypically, active and non-passive in the Islamist, nationalist and feminist struggles. While they worked in the Muslim Brotherhood for the struggles against neo-colonialism and patriarchal subjugation of women, they at the same time find it comfortable and desirous to conform to the dictates of the Islamic tenets and thereby uphold a triple or “triadic” commitment.

CATEGORIZATION OF AL-GHAZZĀLĪ, AYYĀM MIN HAYĀTĪ AND THE DEBATES ABOUT FEMINISM IN THE MUSLIM WORLD

In invoking Elaine (1979) “triadic” to categorize Zaynab and her sisters herein, this paper therefore refers to their nationalist, feminist and Islamic phases in the activism of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt and not the three phases of the female literary tradition meant by Showalter and in respect of which (Uthman, 2010) has argued that Zaynab falls within the last two phases of her category of the ‘feminine’ narrative discourse. Showalter labels these phases as the ‘feminine,’ ‘feminist’ and ‘female.’ That Zaynab and her sisters’ fall within the “triadic” categorization of the nationalist, feminist and Islamic phases in the activism of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt can be vividly seen in *Ayyām min ḥayātī* (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986) which demonstrates their aforementioned “triadic” resistance against the established political, religious and socio-cultural practices of the 20th century Egyptian society. The political dimension of her text is reflected in the Muslim sisters fledging their anti brutal activism with their Muslim brothers against the military regime of Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir. The sisters’ feminist credentials are well reflected by Zaynab’s leadership of the Muslim women association that she founded. It is however, noteworthy that her Islamic identity and commitment, right from being the daughter of a pious and committed Muslim who was al-Azhar graduate, in an Islamic environment to her full commitment and engagement in the Islamic da‘wah or missionary activities from the age of eighteen when she dedicated her life to jihād in the path of Allah, for the establishment of an Islamic state which can be defined as striving in the cause of Allah in the most inclusive and widest sense for example striving in relation to the worldly or material such as helping others, teaching and ameliorating human and non human conditions, striving in relation to the spiritual or moral such as restraining ones passion, greed, lust and soul purification or striving in the physical sense and militarily such as in defence of Islam and Muslims, or freedom from tyranny, freedom of belief, worship and practice. This military jihād does not include war of aggression, imperialism, exploitation, religious bigotry (Waris, 1998). Her jihād is not compromised by her feminist and nationalist images and

shapes.

As a prototype of the Islamic movement, in line with Fedwa (1992) description of the contemporary Shahrazād, Zaynab is “an intellectual wonder who has memorized books poetry, wisdom, and more. She is knowledgeable, intelligent, wise and an adība.” At the time Zaynab and her sisters appeared in the leadership of the Islamic movement in 20th century Egypt, feminist discourses in Muslim societies were already in the front burner of both secular and Islamist activities and discourses. It was at a time when a lot of modernist, liberal and secular Muslims held the views that Islam preserves male privilege and the system of patriarchy and prescribe the subversion of Islamic teachings to deconstruct its misogynic and anti women restrictions in support of patriarchy and gender inequality. Feminist discourses at the time, therefore revolve around the risks of subverting and disobeying Islamic teachings and practices like the system of segregation and veiling of Muslim women. Almost all the Muslim women referred to as Islamic feminists by Miriam (2001) appeared to have gone beyond the stages of pacifying or emulating “patriarchal Islam” but opt for constructing a counter Islamic way of life which Leila Ahmed, the Egyptian born American historian, sees as the deconstruction of the official and “establishment” Islam, and the construction of another Islam for females who interpret Islamic ethos and codes in a way that upholds gender justice and equality for both men and women (Ahmed, 1999). In the deconstruction of the official and “patriarchal” Islam (El-Sadawi, 1980), the Egyptian doctor and women’s rights activist interprets the Islamic veil as a symbol of patriarchal sexuality that calls attention to the bodies of women in the same manner as an uncovered body may do. She criticizes those men who uphold this notion of sexuality as oppressing women with the veil, which according to her is the only way to protect men from her fitnah (seduction, mischief, obscenity, etc.). Similarly, Assia Djebar invokes the ancestral figure of Scheherazade (Arabic, Shahrazād) as an inspirational figure whose subverting and circumventing strategies can be employed by Arab women to achieve “female empowerment’, survival tactics and self expression. She invokes Scheherazade’s inspirational figure to forge an imaginary discourse which perpetuates the East as exotic and the Oriental woman as an object of desire. She focuses on the female body of Scheherazade to demonstrate an explosive sexual relationship and speak of how male violence is met with her volatile sexuality that circumvent traditional Islamic and patriarchal restrictions, censorship and ban on discussions of politics, sex and even religion. She uses poetic prose to analyze issues of segregation, polygamy and the poetical “other”. She makes herself the spokeswoman for the secular feminist agenda and demonstrates how women through circumventing and subverting the structure of polygamy in the Arab family are as a matter of fact, “liberating themselves at the expense of a pseudo-rival

(Djebar, 1987).

In addition, Djebar like Mernissi, who has been the focus of my analysis elsewhere, attacks the harem which she sees as a prison for Arab women from which they seek refuge that is found in the hammam (public bath) where women meet and “commune”. In depicting the prison of the harem, Djebar uses the word “Derra” which in its original Arabic means hurt or wound to refer to a co-wife and thus indicating a rival wife who hurts or inflicts “wound” on the first wife (Cowan, 1960). The aforementioned ‘commune’ in a public space outside the harem is spearheaded by an “emancipated” Arab wife, Isma, who has escaped the prison of the harem and the wounds of her co-wife, got educated in the West and is back home “to awaken” her unlucky sisters by playing the role of a modern Scheherazade who subverts the “patriarchal” Muslim society. It is therefore in this public space that women find “the temporary reprieve” from the confines of their private space in the harem (Djebar, 1987). In this respect, it is the western/secular brand of feminism articulated by the aforementioned women that is shaping Arab sexual identities by Western stereotypes. In fact, Mernissi, in her secular and western aspirations for Muslim women is regarded as a foremost Muslim feminist who has “extricated herself from the cultural or ‘Islamic loyalty.’ It is this cultural or Islamic loyalty that is believed according to Ahmed (1982) to plague many Muslim feminists today in that they are torn between their double identities.” That Mernissi and other “Islamic feminists” like her are not “torn between their double identities” can be seen in the way she and other “Islamic feminists” are ambivalent in their relationship with the West. They oscillate freely between rejecting Islamic teachings and practices based on western and secular mirrors while considering some other enriching and empowering traditions in Islam as susceptible to western piracy and devaluation.

In the fashion of Malti-Douglas (1992), they consider this juxtaposition of “undoing” and “reducing” Islamic teachings and practices and their selective blending with the west as a form of “female empowerment”. Despite their rejection of Western colonialism for instance, especially in modern times, they look to it as a “space of freedom... a place of refuge from repression at home, a space of freedom with the promise of prosperity...” All these feminists who have experienced or are still experiencing living in the west, inhabit a “third space” which in itself cannot be represented and according to Homi (1994), it “makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process” and “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and made anew”. While oscillating freely between their western exposure and deconstruction of “patriarchal” Islamic teachings and the ambivalence of western traditions, these feminists blur

the lines between fiction and reality. In other words, as representatives of feminism to borrow from Bhabha “warned of the tricks of men,” the secular Muslim feminists are challenging “men with tricks of their own.” So this new “female empowerment” is now opening up new vistas of “experience that used to be closed to women” as they emulate the west they conceive as a model “more than as a nemesis” to borrow from Cooke (1999). However this escape to the West is not always the desire of the aforementioned ambivalent feminists. That adventure is at times forced on them because they dare to challenge the male privilege and patriarchal division of space. In the words of Malti-Douglas (1992), “to cross the defined border and encroach on traditionally male space was to risk being accused of being a loose woman, a whore, a belly-dancer”. The worst fate in her view is that those women who write autobiographical narratives suffer “slander, prohibition and imprisonment”. This is what according to her “drives Shahrazād” and women like her who attempt to subvert Islamic teachings “to seek asylum in the West to gain empowerment, integrity, freedom, purity and peace etc.”

To sum up this debate, contrary to Masaad (2007) observes that: what is emerging in the Arab (and the rest of the third) world is not some universal schema of the march of history but rather the imposition of these western modes by different forceful means, thus foreclosing and repressing myriad ways of movement and change and ensuring that only one for transformation is made possible. Women like Zaynab rather turning to the West to serve as models and accept the imposition of western modes in gaining empowerment for Muslim women, turn to only the Islamic traditions. In living their “authentic” Islamic feminism, Zaynab and her sisters in the Muslim Brotherhood eschew this ambivalent condition of feminists in the “third space” and who in the words of Edward (2008) “wanted liberation within the same universe of discourse inhabited by Western culture” as would be seen in the subsequently. Zaynab’s feminism is also dissimilar to that of Muslim women activists like Amina Wadud, Asma Barlas and Lila Abu-Lughod and similar to that of the Moroccan Nadia Yassine who like Zaynab is a spokes woman for a popular Islamist group while at the same time articulating the rights of Muslim women. One common trait to all these women is the belief that issues like women liberation, gender equality and the veil are open to different interpretations. For instance, while Amina Wadud believes that the Qur’an addresses women equally with men, she sees as meaningless, the leadership roles given to men by the Qur’an. It is in order to exercise and play her understanding of the egalitarian leadership role in Islam that she went ahead to become the first woman to lead both men and women in the Friday Congregational prayers in the United States of America (Muslimwakeup.com). Asma Barlas has made it clear that she does not believe in any sexual or gender theory

based on the Qur'an because to her theories about sex and gender are relatively new and therefore the Qur'an is open to multiple interpretations on this (Barlas, 2009) yet Muslim women Nadia Yassine like Zaynab believe the Qur'an does offers a sexual and gender theory of equality.

Zaynab also like Nadia was close to Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Egyptian Muslim brothers and she in fact got her inspiration from him. She like Zaynab also does not believe that Muslim women need emancipation from Islam but rather from both political and despotic interpretations of Islam. Just as she also remains covered and see the Islamic scarf as a form of liberation like Zaynab (Euben and Zaman, 2009). It is for this reason that the next study of this paper will now turn to the brand of "authentic" Islamic feminism, Zaynab in the Muslim Brotherhood.

ZAYNAB AL-GHAZZĀLĪ'S REPRESENTATIONS OF THE "AUTHENTIC" ISLAMIC FEMINISM AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Here, this paper focuses on the autobiographical text of Zaynab to highlight and discuss the Islamic activism of the female activists in the Muslim Brotherhood. The Muslim sisters' perception of these experiences appears to derive from their Islamic understanding, a perspective informed not only by their Islamism in the Muslim Brotherhood but also by their upbringings. For instance Zaynab and Hamidah Qutb's Islamism as shown in the text started in their childhood Islamic environment having been born of pious and religious parents (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). They were raised in "upper class Egyptian families where they became loaded with Islamic teachings and learning." They thus became very early in life immersed in the contours and shapes of Islamic teachings. By the time they were faced with the Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood, they naturally were at home with an Islamic struggle that defines and delimits their lives as Muslims women in all ramifications, including the political, the socio-cultural and the gender. Zaynab's role with Sayyid (1906: 166) in the leadership of the re-organization of the Muslims Brothers after it was outlawed by the government of Jamal 'Abd al-Nasir and how they provided the intellectual inspiration for the plan towards the establishment of an Islamic polity in the Egypt is a good point to start the review of her "authentic" Islamic feminism as well as that of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). This role is a focal point in Zaynab's feminist convergence with that of the Muslim Brothers. The 'masculine' bravery of the sisters of the Muslim brotherhood is demonstrated during these attempts at the re-organization of the brotherhood after it was banned in 1954 by the government. During the period, the Muslim Brothers and sisters as narrated by Al- Ghazzālī (1986) confronted a legendary brutality and torture in torture

chambers as reflected in "whips cutting into their bodies and dogs tearing their bodies to pieces." This period shows how Muslim women are placed in the centre of Islamic revivalism even in the face of repression and torture by the Muslim Brotherhood. For instance, Zaynab assumed the leading role in the reorganization of the brotherhood Sayyid Qutb after its aforementioned proscription. She as a matter of fact, was the one who sought permission from the then General Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Hudaybi to work together with her own brother, Muhammad and other brothers like 'Abdul Fattah Isma'il to reorganize and revive the organization (Ushama, 2009).

In the course of carrying out the aforementioned assignment, Zaynab and 'Abdul Fattah Isma'il later saw the need to seek permission from al-Hudaybi to appoint Sayyid Qutb as a spiritual guide of the re-organization. Thus, Zaynab, Qutb and others conceived, planned and executed the re-organization of the Muslim Brothers with the full permission of the General Guide of the brotherhood as mentioned earlier. Throughout all these activities, Zaynab was working together with the men of the brotherhood and met with The general Guide several times to receive instruction or direction. For instance when Qutb gave her his work "milestone" or "Ma'lim fi al-Tariq" for publication to use in the training of members of the brotherhood, she went to the General Guide to seek his views and obtain his permission. The General Guide, after reading some sections of the book, officially permitted it to be published (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). The insistence of Zaynab and others to initiate the revival and re-organization of the brotherhood soon provided an excuse for the government to arrest many of them and accused them of planning a coup to assassinate the president and overthrow his government, for which Sayyid Qutbe was sentenced to fifteen years of imprisonment with hard labour. Throughout the aforementioned incarceration, Qutb continued to lead the re-organization of the brotherhood inside the prison while Zaynab, working with him led the movement outside the prison. Together, they conducted meetings and trainings with the Muslim Brothers and sisters, providing intellectual, moral and spiritual guidance for those inside and outside the prison respectively (Ushama, 2009). The government however succeeded in haunting the leaders of the movement for the revival of the Muslim brotherhood by infiltrating their midst through 'Ali Ashmawi, a member of the youth Council of five responsible for the reorganization and a retired accountant in the Egyptian Public Service. He became an agent, spy and protégé of the Investigation Bureau and his statement was used to convict Qutb and many other leaders and members of the brotherhood of treason and felony against the state. They were thrown in their hundreds and thousands into prison.

The government confiscated their property, tortured and persecuted them and against all international and

human right norms sentenced many of them to death including Qutb in 1966 (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). This allegation, for which Zaynab, Qutb and other members of the brotherhood were arrested, convicted and sentenced to varying years of imprisonment and death sentences was not fully investigated and neither was their trial guided by universal democratic and human rights norms. They were tried by special military courts headed by judges who were army officers and characterized by legal and technical anomalies, irregularities and discrepancies. For instance, they were tried under a retroactive law in 1966 and during their trials, the government banned members of the public and the press. Even the lawyer sent by the Amnesty International as an observer in the court proceedings was as well prohibited from attending the proceedings. One of the unfortunate results of these legal irregularities was the death sentence also handed down on Farid 'Abd al-Khaliq and Munir Dallah along with Qutb in 1966. Though the two were among the leaders of the brotherhood, they were not involved in its re-organization and in fact rejected the idea when they were invited to lead it before Qutb was appointed. They vehemently opposed the re-organization because they considered it hazardous and dangerous. They went further to complain to the General Guide and called for the abolition of the idea (Ushama, 2009). As stated before, their arrest, imprisonment and conviction in 1966 were based solely on the evidence provided by 'Ali Ashmawi who was, as a matter of fact, an agent, spy and protégé of the government commissioned to implicate the Muslim brotherhood in the aforementioned allegation of armed revolt to assassinate the President and overthrow its government. This proves conclusively that the government itself orchestrated the conspiracy that entrapped Zaynab, Qutb and other Muslim brothers and sisters. For this reason, the government prohibited the members of the public, the press and all the lawyers who came forward to volunteer their services to defend Qutb and the other Muslim Brothers from attending the court proceedings (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986).

One of the most prominent features of the Da'wah approaches of the Muslim Brotherhood and championed by Zaynab and her sisters is reflection upon the conditions of women in the Egyptian society where they were oppressed, maltreated and dominated upon. They generally lacked education, training and marital security and could be disposed off at the whims and caprices of their husbands. It was against this background that the Muslim Brotherhood addressed the feminist questions in Islam and demonstrates that Islam had granted Muslim women total freedom from oppression and domination (Blackman, 1968). That this was a cardinal area of the brotherhood's activities is reflected in the views of even the male members. In his commentary for instance, Sayyid Qutb explains the Islamic concept of marriage as well as the philosophy behind its principles of family formation, maintenance, sexuality polygamy and

inheritance etc. He discusses how these principles address the rights and welfare of Muslim women. For instance, he argues that Islamic law on forming the family through the conduct of a public marriage between a man and a woman leads to a high degree of security for women and children as well as increased sense of responsibilities for men. While commenting on the verse of multiple marriages in Islam (Q3:4), he also argues that the verse, according to him, not only limits the number of wives a man can marry to four, it also emphasizes the obligatory fulfillment of justice by a man in respect of the provision of his wives' economic, medical and sexual needs (Badmas, 2009). He also opposes all legal rulings denying the rights of a widow to both inheritance and bequest in her marital residence for one year. By opposing the general notion of naskh wa'l-mansukh (theory of abrogation and the abrogated), he restores to Muslim women their divine rights to bequest. Therefore rather than rejecting absolutely the use of philosophy in the interpretation of the Qur'an, he only advocates making revelation the basis of Islamic outlook, exegesis and the application of reasoning and rationality. That this represents the position of the Muslim Brotherhood is revealed by Blackman (1968) who documents that the brotherhood opposes the confinement of women to the four walls of their homes and upholds their right to go out as long as they observe the Islamic dress code of covering their body, leaving only the face and hands.

The brotherhood also enunciates the right of women to earn a living and have free access to education to the highest level possible. Similarly, it affirms their right to family planning as long as it is medically healthy for them to do so as well as their right to participate in politics if it will not affect their primary responsibilities in the home fronts. The aforementioned is the opinion of Zaynab and her sisters who even before joining the Muslim Brotherhood, observes the Islamic veil while believing and demonstrating their gendered roles in jihād. So, we see in the course of this gendered jihād the shattered faces of Muslim sisters, female casualties and martyrs while fighting for enthroning Islam in Egypt, the resistance movement against Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir's neo imperialist government and in defence of the rights of Muslim women in the language of the Islamic movement and under the banner of Islam (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). Nationalism or patriotism has been shown by many feminists as one of the driving forces behind women's resistance and resilience activities and nowhere is this intersection between feminism and nationalism largely and critically studied as in Muslim women's Arab struggles in respect of Egypt. Thus Zaynab's narratives of the comparable experiences of the slavery, oppression and inhumanity that the Egyptian women in general and the Muslim women of the Muslim Brotherhood in particular, suffered at the hands of Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir, only follows this tradition of feminism and nationalism. As noted by Margot Badran (1988), it is the need for "dual

liberation” from the imperialist occupation and patriarchal oppression that sparked off the women struggles in Egypt. Similarly, Majaj et al. (2002) have also identified how nationalist struggles have made women to lay aside traditional feminine roles and become feminist actors in the struggles for political and social transformation in Lebanon, Palestine and Algeria. Their book affirms ways in which these women have used nationalist struggles to create public spaces for themselves and their sexualities which defy popular “gendered construction”. While general Muslim women’s resistance and resilience is a dominant theme in the aforementioned account of nationalist struggles against Western imperialism, Zaynab’s narratives are full of the Muslim Brotherhood women’s resistance and resilience against internal Egyptian imperialism and enslavement of Egyptian women. She records how Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir turns Egypt into a battleground and takes away the freedom as well as independence which the brotherhood has given Muslim women.

Political power in the hands of Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir led military junta, portrays the junta as nursing the belief that they alone have in the words of Oladosu (2008) “agency, knowledge and patriotism.” It images them in the mould of the “African godfather, who sees himself as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent.” For this reason, Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir refuses to tolerate any form of opposition and opinion from the other. He claims to know what is good for Egypt and Egyptians. The ignorance of the junta can be seen in its foot soldiers and their supporters’ belief that every woman wants to be dominated both economically and carnally and this according to Zaynab is her main fear for the sisters of the brotherhood (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). It is ignorance because it is based on the essentialization and objectification of women as ebonies structured in nudity to gratify men’s sexualities and following the fashion of the colonialists (El-Messiri, 2006), the soldiers of the junta consider women’s nudity as a sign of their being open minded and civilized. While most of the fictional and factual poetic and prosaic texts on Muslim women present Islamist women as the essentialist and stereotypical passive, weak and helpless wives, mothers, sisters and concubines who accept the domestic chores of looking after the children, the harem or private space, Zaynab’s text is a far cry from this category as it narrates stories of Muslim women who are actors in the public sphere and make the traditional male space female spaces (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). By so doing, they actively question the domestic, sexual and economic enslavement of Egyptian women in the mould of the British colonialism of Egypt since British imperialism was not the in Egypt to profit the Egyptians but in reality to profit itself sexually and economically as alluded to by Balfour (Said, 1994). Nevertheless, the aforementioned “re-presence” of Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood and Muslim women in Ayyām min Hayātī, is not an indication that the “authentic” Islamic feminist “text” of Zaynab is limited in space and time. This is

because her text is representative of the feminist questions both in different divides of the Muslim world today as seen in the case of Nadia Yassine of Morocco, Fatimah Nassef of Saudi Arabia and other similar Muslim women (Uthman, 2010). This is therefore a reenactment of the Islamic feminism in Islam as demonstrated by the commitments of Muslim women right from the time of the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW) (Uthman, 2005).

Zaynab’s text therefore mediates and images how, in-between the time of the Prophet and today, the conditions of Muslim women became determined by socio-cultural practices in the Muslim world and outside the Islamic absolute sources of the Qur’an and Sunnah. Thus her text traces the persona of the Muslim woman in Islam and reclaims the rights of Muslim women in the golden prophetic era through the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). Thus her text is written in a way that allows the Islamic feminist as defined in this paper, to engage not only the ‘self’ and the ‘other’ in Islam but in the culturist fashion of Homi Bhabha (1994) aforementioned, “the otherness of the self”¹ of the feminist movement all over the world. This otherness as reflected upon and represented by Zaynab is not limited in scope to Muslim female/male, domestic/public and Egypt/Muslim Brotherhood divides. She, instead, includes and admits into the scope of this ‘otherness’ the entire Islamic history, Muslim world and the whole world. Thus, the Muslim Brotherhood reminds us of the humanity of Muslim women as underscored by the positive and utilitarian brand of Islamic feminism among the prophetic generation. They thus remind us of the hypocrisy and un-Islamicity of cultural practices in the Muslim world that demands from women, life according to stereotyped misogyny, economic dependence, acceptance of brutality, proof of virginity, restrictions on mobility, censorship on speech, the feminine virtue of silence and unconditional obedience to male relations, especially husbands and fathers, the abuse of polygamy that dangles over every woman, association of women with madness, evil, sorcery and fitnah (Uthman, 2010). To counter these restrictions, Zaynab and her fellow Muslim sisters in the Muslim Brotherhood came out to challenge the political sexually and economical brutality and rape of Egypt as well as their feminine honour and bodies. They not only spoke and fought against these violators; they also did so in the name of Islam and quoting Islamic teachings. They refused to be beleaguered, submissive and resigned before their rapists and oppressors. They would rather be killed fighting to protect their bodies and ‘sharaf’ or honour. But they also refuse the path of suicide or what some Muslim scholars have permitted in the name of “martyrdom blowing-up,” “exploding” or “killing”. They withstand the humiliation of the torture chambers without giving up the secrets of the brotherhood or the names of the fellow brethren.

¹. Bhabha, *The Location*, p. 44

Their sacrifice thus constitutes the peak of their “authentic” Islamic feminism in world when Muslim women are used as suicide bombers and foot soldiers in killing their fellow women, all in the name of fighting the state whose foot soldiers rape men and women to coerce them to admit to planning and executing acts of felony and arson (Al-Ghazzālī, 1986). As Zaynab narrates the story of her ordeals and those of her Muslim sisters in Egyptian prisons in the 1960s and the methods of terrorism and control by the state, it is clear that, to borrow the words of Moser and Clark (2001), Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir and his junta are “men...the perpetrators (of violence) in defence of the nation... while (Zaynab and her sisters) women (are) victims...” who are involved in these “violent conflicts” while not themselves “passive, peaceful stereotypes”.² Thus Zaynab’s narratives are the product of first-hand and on the spot participant involvement experiences of these non-passive Muslim women during their imprisonment first for a year in the men’s prison known as ‘war prison’ with famous leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood such as Sayyid Qutb, Isma‘il Faraghi and ‘Abdul Qadir ‘Awdah before they were later transferred to the women’s prison, Qanatir. In these prisons, Zaynab (1986) chronicles the inhuman experiences that the government of Jamāl ‘Abd al-Nāsir subjected its people to. They consisted of ‘hell’, a crucible meant for melting even men by metals, tortures, whippings, biting by ferocious dogs, weeklong immersions in water, suspended hangings, fire-cells and for some the ultimate and supreme price. In her words: “the brotherhood is facing harsh repression and torture with whips cutting into their bodies and dogs tearing their bodies to pieces.”

CONCLUSION

The foregoing analysis has shown that Zaynab appropriates Islam in her autobiographical text to support the Muslim sisters and her own conception of nationalist, feminist and Islamist subjectivities in 20th/21st Centuries Egyptian and indeed the entire global Muslim society. The text gives us refreshing images of the public and religious roles of Muslim women and their Islamic feminist resistance to gender discrimination and oppression premised on engagement with the “authentic” absolute Islamic sources. Through this Islamism carried out in the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, Zaynab and her fellow Muslim sisters succeeded in establishing a nexus between Islam and the advancement of women’s rights and promotion of their identities as proactive subjects. No wonder, their political, feminist and Islamic stance is based on Islamic nuances found in the absolute sources of Islam as they quote profusely from the Qur’an and

Sunnah to invoke Islamic justifications for their views. These quotations are not like customary of the other Muslim feminists provided out of their immediate contexts, circumstances and original references of revelations and applications. They in no way subvert the injunctions and commandments of these religious texts on marriage, leadership and the veil etc. While one may therefore disagree with their interpretation of Islamic texts and question to what extent their version of Islamic feminism should be accepted as “authentic,” one would find it difficult to accuse Zaynab and her sister of undermining these Islamic texts in the name of the feminist movement as done by most of the secular Muslim feminists referred to in this study.

Her appropriation of Islam in support of feminism may not be accepted as the “authentic” Islamic feminism but it is clear that it is not intended to subvert or circumvent Islamic teachings and traditions but to demonstrate how they are empowering and can be used to empower Muslim women. Thus, the text portrays the Muslim sisters of the brotherhood as symbols of the nationalist, feminist and Islamist struggles embarked upon by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and as active resilient participants, martyrs and soldiers who stood tall in resisting the rape of women and Egypt, their motherland.

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² Moser and Clark (ed.), *Victims, Perpetrators or Actors? Gender, armed conflict and political violence* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2001), pp. 3-4.

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