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BIOGRAPHY

Haideh Moghissi is a professor of sociology and women's studies at York University in Toronto. Before leaving Iran in 1984, she was one of the founders of the Iranian National Union of Women and was a member of its first executive and editorial boards.

At York, Dr. Moghissi has served as associate dean of external relations at the Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies, as coordinator of the Certificate for Anti-Racist Research and Practice, as chair of the executive committee of the Centre for Feminist Research, and as a member of the executive committee of the Centre for Refugee Studies. She has commented on Iran and women in the Middle East on CBC, TVO, the BBC World Service, Radio France, and Voice of America, and has sat on the editorial and advisory boards of the *Journal of Comparative Public Policy*, the *Women and Politics* series by Routledge, *Resources for Feminist Research*, and *Feminist Forum*. Her second book, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism*, won the Choice Outstanding Academic Books Award for sociology.

She was nominated a Trudeau fellow in 2011.

ABSTRACT

A personal narrative of life experiences that sparked engagement with the subjects of academic inquiry, this paper reflects upon the populist anti-colonial standpoints within and outside the Middle East. It is argued that, rejecting such notions as universalism, secularism, and human rights, a good number of the left and liberal intellectuals, feminists included, are caught in an apologetic valuation of all political movements and activism that challenge the West's economic

and cultural hegemony, including radical Islamism. Even though the intention is to support the rights to self-representation of peoples who have long been demonized by racist perceptions and Islamophobia, this wrong-headed advocacy has negative consequences for opposition groups, most specifically women, in the region and in the diaspora.

LECTURE

"'The Return of the Sacred' and the Politics of Cultural Difference"

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Introduction

Years into exile from my homeland, one grey, gloomy afternoon, I was drawn to the heavenly voice of Cecilia Bartoli, singing a Rossini opera. In the libretto, I heard an amazing concept: "victime volontaire." Bartoli sang the words in a manner that resembled sobbing and moved me greatly. The poetic notion of "victime volontaire" aptly defines things we sometimes do in life, temptations to which we sometimes surrender, impulses on which we act even though our inner self warns us against the suffering that could ensue. On that gloomy afternoon, those two words resonated profoundly with the trajectory of my own life, a trajectory in which I willingly took part in a revolution that later turned against me, my family, and my friends and forced me to leave behind all that I had worked for and loved.

Of course, what I have experienced in my life is just one variation of the experience of many hundreds of thousands of middle-class, secular, left and liberal Iranian intellectuals and other women and men whose lives were shattered by the Iranian revolution. We accepted the leadership of a clergyman whose actions and words should have signalled his disdain for political democracy, freedom of expression, individual liberties, and the right to choice. This leader had for years opposed any legal reforms in favour of women, and he was committed

to the re-Islamicization of women's rights and status. It was not until our legal rights and personal freedoms had been crushed under the authoritarian Islamist regime this man established that we recognized that freedom and progress cannot arise from ideologies and movements that claim divine origin, demand blind obedience, and are determined to resurrect the past.

From these opening comments, it is no doubt clear that the political and social milieu of post-revolutionary Iran, and the events in which I was such a passionate participant, reshaped my life. These experiences also sparked my engagement with the subjects that I took up in my research, writing, and social activities. Yet, with the passage of time and my acceptance of the permanency of my displacement, my new social reality has also pushed me into additional sites of inquiry, ones that have been equally complex and conflict-ridden and that have marginalized me intellectually. I will come back to this later.

Let me begin, then, by stating that my physical departure from my homeland, four years after the revolution, catalyzed my political departure from the paralyzing populist illusions and self-negating activism of the left, wrapped in an anti-imperialist robe in post-revolutionary Iran. Edward Saïd was right in suggesting that separation from one's homeland and one's own culture—a displacement that repositions one to look back at the country of origin through detached eyes—might be the only way to reassess critically the social relations, cultural values, and practices of one's home country, and to think through ways that one's country of origin might be salvaged from its own vices.[1]

In my case, a change in geographical location, compounded by a decline in my social status—I was now variously cast as a *visible minority*, a woman *of colour*, and an immigrant—pressed on me a sense of marginality. Distance from the fears, concerns, and pressing

1. Edward Saïd, "Reflections on Exile," in *Out There. Marginalization and Contemporary Culture*, eds. R. Fergusson et al. (New York: New Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, 1990).

responsibilities of life under Islamic rule also allowed me to rethink and reconsider the old dogmas. This departure from the past created yet another layer of marginality. But at the same time, my double or triple marginality opened a space from which I could more closely ponder the ways in which the ideological and theoretical standpoint that I had embraced for so long worked in practice. I saw more clearly how it was possible for a people that for a long time lived under the iron fist of a corrupt tyrant supported by foreign powers, and that had been deprived of the freedom and the exposure to alternative ideas necessary for political education, to fall next under the spell of yet another undemocratic, rights-negating, charismatic individual.

Of even greater significance to me, personally and politically, was the question of whether the secular left and liberal forces, which had put off claims for democracy, freedom, and human rights in favour of the seemingly higher goals of anti-imperialism and class struggle, had a political and moral responsibility in all of this. This question underpinned my first book in English, *Populism and Feminism in Iran: Women's Participation in a Male-Defined Revolutionary Movement* (Macmillan, 1994), a work whose origins lay in my doctoral dissertation. The political uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa in 2011 and 2012 resonate with this question, and subsequent developments in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, and Syria demonstrate both that the Iranian experience was not unique and that many progressive intellectuals in the region and beyond have not learned from it. But that is a different subject.

What I find striking though—and it is on this that I will focus when I refer to discourses on Muslims in and outside the larger Middle East—is that the populist, anti-imperialist stance of the left has also permeated and shaped the discourses of progressive, left-leaning postcolonial intellectuals in the West. More precisely, a good number of individuals and groups within and outside academe, concerned with the rights of peoples who have long been demonized by racist and colonialist perceptions, seem to be caught in an apologetic, self-denying

valuation of all political movements that challenge the West's economic and cultural hegemony. This is unfortunate, because local tyrants are using the views of this category of Westerners to discredit dissenting voices inside their regimes. The negative consequences for the people in the region, especially women who are engaged in life-threatening resistance against their own subjugation, are significant.

No doubt the sweeping political events of the 1980s and 1990s, and the subsequent developments in world politics, have sharpened these intellectual tendencies around the world. These were indeed disturbing decades, marked by the establishment of a bloody, religious regime in Iran, and followed by the Reagan–Bush (senior) era in the United States; the Soviet invasion of and the war in Afghanistan, whose impact has continued into the 21st century; dashed hopes over the visionary promises of socialism; a global wave of regressive economic and social policies at home and military adventures abroad; and so on. It seems that for some Western intellectuals, these events prompted the collapse of the appeal and desirability of secularism, by which I mean not only religious freedom but also freedom from religion, a basic element of democracy.

Hence the "return of the sacred," in the words of Bassam Tibi, and, along with it, the growing tendency to focus on the imperfections of modernity and to express skepticism about history's sense of direction. This retreat from the democratic ideals and values that have been the hallmark of modern society has set off a relativist approach to human rights, cultural difference, anti-colonial movements, and feminist strategies in the periphery, namely in Muslim-majority countries. Many anti-war activists and some feminists located within and outside academe fall into this intellectual domain. The phenomenon has led these players to reject the universal in favour of the particular, to overemphasize culture and cultural difference, and to favour a culture-bound meaning of such important issues as democracy, justice, and human rights. At the same time, we witness a celebration of the agency of the oppressed without

an interrogation of the classed, gendered, racist, and heterosexist manifestations of these agencies, including the sometimes violent ways in which they are expressed. This thinking, presently in fashion, has been detrimental to justice-seeking struggles in the region, especially the struggles of women, at a time when there is an urgent need for intelligent and well-thought-out global support for the struggle of progressive women and men the world over.[2]

I fear that "intellectual astigmatism,"[3] which I have discussed in my book *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism: The Limits of Postmodern Analysis* (Zed and Oxford University Press, 1999 and 2000), frequently causes all anti-West cultural claims and discourses, including variations of radical Islamism, the Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat Islami, Elnahda, and Khomeinism, to be perceived as progressive, even though the beliefs, actions, and words of these groups negate the very notion of progress. This viewpoint diminishes all other social and political conflicts, rendering them secondary to conflicts between the colonialists and the colonized, and defends the rights of the previously silenced to self-representation without much concern for the dissenting voices of sections of those same populations who, if they speak out, are castigated, silenced, and accused of siding with the oppressors by the same anti-colonial, oppressed heroes.

2. In his "The Left and Jihadis" (www.opendemocracy.net, September 7, 2006), the late Fred Holiday, a Middle East expert and socialist public intellectual, listed examples of left-wing support for Islamist rights. Among them are the Socialist Workers Party signs carried in an anti-war rally in London that read, "We are all Hezbollah." For more examples of similar positions, see Meredith Tax, *Double Bind: The Muslim Right, the Anglo-American Left, and Universal Human Rights* (New York: Centre for Secular Space, 2012).

3. I have borrowed the word "astigmatism" from James Jones (who borrowed it from someone else) to refer to the incapacity of some professionals to make moral judgments in their "scientific" research. See James Jones, "The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: 'A Moral Astigmatism,'" in *The "Racial" Economy of Science: Toward a Democratic Future*, ed. Sandra Harding (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993).

Let me elaborate on this point. I often feel that I cause discomfort, and sometimes even resentment, when I discuss the Islamic politics of gender in some left-wing and/or feminist academic gatherings. Some people respond with a condensed lecture on colonialism and imperialism, and recount a range of atrocities committed against Muslims past and present. Others mention the principle of respecting difference and a diversity of views and lifestyles; they good-heartedly but paternalistically cite examples of how the Western ideal of gender equality has remained partial, superficial, and flawed, and suggest that feminist strategies in the West are not a model to follow. Still others ask questions or make comments that directly or indirectly question my political and emotional connection and loyalty to the people and culture from which I originate.

At times, the rationale for silence about Islamic gendered practices or Islamists' agendas is that populations suffering from poverty, unemployment, and neo-colonial aggression should not be polarized by gender-related questions. This rationale fails to acknowledge that women represent the overwhelming majority of the armies of the poor, the unemployed, and the exploited in these societies, and that they are the daily targets of misogynist humiliation and violence.

During the debates over the introduction of the Ontario Arbitration Act, for example, while several Canadian women's groups[4]

4. Among these groups were the Women's Legal Education and Action Fund, the National Association of Women and the Law, the Metropolitan Toronto Action Committee on Violence Against Women, and the National Council of University Women. An open letter signed by Margaret Atwood, Maude Barlow, June Callwood, Shirley Douglas, Michele Landsberg, Flora MacDonald, Margaret Norrie McCain, Maureen McTeer, Sonja Smits, and Lois Wilson asked then premier of Ontario Dalton McGuinty not to ghettoize women's rights by allowing religion-based arbitration. The debates ended when the premier declared that all Canadians would be covered under existing family law.

joined the Canadian Council of Muslim Women's[5] lobby against the application of sharia law during arbitration, other prominent feminist academics adopted a hands-off approach in the name of respecting cultural diversity and exhibiting tolerance and fairness to Muslims. In effect, they were siding with a small minority of conservative men who presented themselves as the voices of the Muslim community and who were aggressively pursuing their own agenda for the Islamicization of the legal and social life of the diasporas in direct opposition to the challengers of sharia law. For instance, to show that theocratic states were not alone in oppressing women, these feminist academics warned their audience that women's rights were not fully protected under Canadian family law or under the Canadian Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms. To illustrate their argument, they pointed to the gendered character of the workforce, the lower status and poorer remuneration associated with female work, the unpaid child-rearing and domestic tasks in which women engage, and the ongoing violence in secular states perpetuated against women, including sexual assault, domestic battering, femicide, and sexual harassment. They then advised "Westernized" Canadian feminists "to consider redirecting their critique from the gender dynamics within Muslim cultures to a critique of the racism and level of intolerance that other Canadians have demonstrated towards Islamic communities."[6] And who were these "Westernized" women? They were members of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women and members of an international group, Women Living Under Muslim Laws, who had stated that a fully secular state was women's best protector and that the

5. For the position of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, see the press release "One Law for All Ontarians," available at http://ccmw.com/one-law-for-all-ontarians.

6. Constance Backhouse, "Muslim Women in Western Societies," Trudeau Foundation Annual Conference, November 16–18, 2006 (Vancouver), conference presentation (unpublished).

proposal to apply sharia amounted to "the political manipulation of culture and identity."[7]

The response of another post-colonial, anti-racist academic to the debate was similar: she too raised important issues and implied that struggling against these issues was more morally valuable than working on the controversial policy at hand. This academic made valid points, including the point that the colour line drawn between the civilized West and the uncivilized East has become particularly pernicious post 9/11. She also argued, with reason, that "feminism can be easily annexed to the project of empire," as during the preparation of the war on Afghanistan.[8] But no one should deny the importance of the battle in which Muslim women in the diaspora are engaged.

In yet another instance of the phenomenon, a known scholar acknowledged that sharia law might privilege male entitlement but accused Canadian feminists who lobbied to prohibit religious arbitration of perpetuating "the dichotomy between the modern, enlightened West and pre-modern, backward Islam."[9] This scholar's point was that "in a post 9/11 world where the surveillance and control of Muslims and those perceived as Muslims has been justified under the guise of national security, feminist endorsement of an exclusively state-run apparatus has failed to understand the legitimate resistance to government policies that perpetuate punitive and stigmatizing measures against people of colour."[10] This analysis may be true in a Western context. But the relationship between women and the

7. See Sherene H. Razack, "The Sharia Law Debate in Ontario: The Modernity/Premodernity Distinction in Legal Efforts to Protect Women from Culture," *Feminist Legal Studies* 15, no. 3–32 (2007), 8.

8. Ibid.

9. Natasha Bakt, "Were Muslim Barbarians Really Knocking on the Gates of Ontario? The Religious Arbitration Controversy—Another Perspective," *Ottawa Law Review*, 40th Anniversary (2005), 67–82; quote p. 13.

10. Ibid.

state in non-Western societies, including Middle Eastern societies, is much more complex than in the West. A myriad of factors have historically given the state in these societies the role of arbitrating between women and religious leaders, or even that of promoting women's rights and protecting women from the cultural and religious prescriptions and restrictions imposed on them by their own communities.

Following the Arab uprising, this cultural relativism has resurfaced against feminist activists in the region who speak up against the Islamists' gendered narratives and the agendas of post-"liberation" states. For instance, the Egyptian American writer and activist Mona Eltahawy[11] was resentfully criticized for having written an article in which she expressed concern about the policies of the Muslim Brotherhood: Eltahawy had argued that although Big Mubarak is gone, real freedom requires Egyptians to do away with the Small Mubarak in their minds and their bedrooms. Eltahawy's critics decried manifestations of racism against Muslims in the West to silence Eltahawy and others who criticized Islamic gender roles in the Muslim Brotherhood's agenda. According to the logic of these critics, nationalist movements and the well-being and self-worth of a people are harmed less by specific indefensible practices than by speaking out against those practices.

Similarly, a Palestinian hip-hop group, DAM, was denounced for a music video it produced about honour crimes. The critics argued that the group had presented "Palestinians as uncivilized, blaming the community and devaluing the culture" and that it had

11. As reported by *The Guardian* on Wednesday, September 26, 2012, Mona Tahawy was also arrested in New York for spraying paint over an anti-Muslim poster on the subway. The poster, which had been put up by the American Freedom Defense Initiative led by Pam Geller, equated Muslims with "savages." See "Activist arrested in New York for defacing anti-Muslim poster," *The Guardian*, September 26, 2012, available at www.siawi.org/article 3986.html.

"followed the script of an international campaign" against what they identify as "*so-called* honour killing."[12] Using the same rationale, others condemn Western advocacy of women's rights in the region on the grounds that Western support is about "secular, pro-Western, often anti-Islamic" women and does not consider the suffering of "the women belonging to the Brotherhood" under Mubarak.[13]

I must add that many women in the region are anxious about the consequences of the rise of Islamists to power and about Islamists' agenda for women. This was the predominant theme at a 2012 conference in Istanbul, Turkey, that several groups within the Association for Women's Rights in Development organized and at which I spoke. Not a single individual among the 150 or so experts and activists present from almost every country in the region saw any positive outcome of the Islamists' capture of state power in their country or the country of others.[14] And, honestly, I do not believe that anyone was prepared to accept the recommendations of scholars such as Margo Badran, who advocated that "we need to widen our definition of Islamism" in order to see "more liberal and progressive manifestations or radical (in a positive sense) potential of present political Islamic movements."[15]

12. Lila Abu Lughod and Maya Mikdashi, "Tradition and the Anti-Politics Machine: DAM Seduced by the 'Honor Crime,'" available at www.jadaliyya.com/pages/index/8578/tradition-and-the-anti-politics-machine_dams-s...1/25/2013.

13. Haroon Siddiqui, "Forked Tongues Parse Arab Spring," *Toronto Star*, July 8, 2012.

14. Algerians and Iranians who had experienced the atrocities of Islamists first-hand were the first to worry about what was in the making in Tunisia and Egypt. Self-identified Muslim human rights lawyer and 2003 Nobel laureate Shirin Ebadi expressed these concerns when she called upon Arab women to learn from the experiences of women in Iran and warned them against making the same mistakes. (Shirin Ebadi, "A Warning for Women of the Arab Spring," *Wall Street Journal*, March 14, 2012, available at http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203370604577265840773370720.html).

15. M. Badran, "Understanding Islam, Islamism, and Islamic Feminism," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no. 1 (2001), 48.

Many women also find appalling cultural relativists' stance about the human-rights framework. The suggestion that the discourse and practice of universal human rights are "coercion by intellectual means," "cultural imperialism," and "the use of soft power"—in the words of the editors of the book *Negotiating Culture and Human Rights*[16]—is honey to the ears of the power elite in certain nation-states whose privileges would be threatened by the intervention of universalist monitors or scholars of human rights.

I grant the limitation of the human-rights paradigm, namely, its focus on civil and political rights while ignoring economic, social, environmental, and cultural rights. That Western governments' use of the human-rights discourse is politically motivated, self-serving, and a double standard is also true. At the same time, though, hundreds of thousands of women living in Middle Eastern and North African societies are making good use of the human-rights framework to claim their rights and mobilize support for their claims. These women resent human-rights organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch for their failure to expose violations of women's rights with the same force as they expose violations of the rights of Islamists. Amnesty International, for example, has been criticized for vigorously defending Islamists' rights, notably in Algeria in 1991, while granting little attention to "the rights of women, intellectuals, and civilians who were terrorized, raped and killed by these same Islamists."[17] A letter written by 17 global women's

16. Lynda Bell, Andrew J. Nathan, and Ilan Peleg, "Introduction, Culture and Human Rights," in *Negotiating Culture and Human Rights* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), cited in Reza Afshari, "Iran: An Anthropologist Engaging the Human Rights Discourse and Practice," *Human Rights Quarterly* 34 (2012), 507–45.

17. See Meredith Tax, "Human Rights Groups Blur Issues of Women's Rights," February 28, 2012, available at http://womensenews.org/story/equalitywomen%E2%80%99s-rights/120227/human-rights-groups-blur-issues-women-rights#.UjBdemSDShY.

human-rights groups also criticized United States–based Human Rights Watch's 2012 report for having "lowered the bar" for the advocacy of human rights. During the Cold War, the women wrote, "the normative human rights subject" was an Eastern European dissident. Now, the subject is the accused jihadi in Guantanamo, whom the organization characterizes simplistically as victims while refusing to examine "fundamentalists' ideas and practices for fear of complicating the issue."[18]

Daily we learn of crimes against Muslims, and of Muslims' crimes against themselves and others, even as we are confronted with the spectre of state terrorism in the name of the war on terrorism. And it is daunting to sift through media reports and political analyses for truthful, balanced interpretations. But it helps to remember that social realities are multi-layered, multi-dimensional, and integrated. We do not have to choose between forces of oppression in an effort to determine what is detrimental to peaceful and dignified living.

It is all a question of balance. In the context of the present discussion, maintaining balance involves paying careful attention to all voices. This is of the utmost importance: enjoying unjustifiable support in some circles, radical Islamists are posing political and moral challenges to the West's hegemony and its dominant liberal values. These challenges are playing themselves out not only in the Middle East and North Africa, but also, increasingly, on the streets of Toronto, London, and New York. In Canada, the policy implications are already being felt.

Before focusing on this issue, though, let me set the record straight in regard to my own position. Pleading for greater tolerance and respect for difference, particularly when diasporic Muslim communities are the target of anti-Muslim racism, is most certainly the right thing to do. Indeed, revealing specific forms of discrimination and racism against Muslims, such as those relating to Muslims'

18. Ibid.

access to jobs, housing, and social services, and exposing the general unwarranted suspicion and disrespect to which Muslims are subject, have been the central focus of my research and publications in the last decade. For example, I was the principal investigator of a major collaborative research initiative that was funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and was international in scope. For this initiative, my research team pinpointed social and economic factors that could promote or impede individuals' sense of belonging to their new country and undermine or enhance their loyalty to the goals of social cohesion and social harmony of multicultural, plural societies like Canada.[19]

But my team also took care to differentiate between two groups of Muslims, the first of which comprises the overwhelming majority of the Muslim population, which emigrated in the hope of finding a decent life free from violence, disrespect, discrimination, and harassment; is determined to live by the socio-cultural codes of society at large; and is eager to be accepted and included in this country.[20]

Majority or not, the fact remains that Canada's largest cities are now the sites of a small, new hyper-Islamic group of people who want to turn this country into an extension of their religion-soaked neighbourhoods in Tehran, Kabul, Kerachi, and Cairo. These people are often mobilized and organized in exclusivist associations and assemblies of different sorts by imported Salafi and Wahabi imams and Shii preachers, some of whom are inspired, and sometimes even funded, by Saudi and Iranian dollars. They insist on exceptional privileges by making cultural claims, and they promote social conservatism targeting youth and women. And I continue to believe that it is easier for the Canadian government to accommodate the cultural and religious demands of this second group than to address the genuine economic and

19. Haideh Moghissi et al., *Diaspora by Design: Muslim Immigrants in Canada and Beyond* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

20. Ibid., 194.

political grievances of the majority of the Muslim population that struggles so hard to lead a decent, peaceful life free from disrespect and discrimination in this country.

I know that I am not alone in my terror before the long-term consequences of the seemingly benign and neutral policy of non-interference in religious and community institutions. The threat to girls and young women is the most worrying, as the alarming number of cases of child abuse and honour killings (16 reported and publicized cases in Canada between 2006 and 2012) will attest. But there are other consequences as well, namely, the further ghettoization of this section of the population, a sidelining that strengthens the power and authority of the conservative leadership. The outcome is that other groups in these communities find it increasingly difficult to raise their voices, and the conservatives become emboldened to intimidate the rest of the population further.

Consider, for example, such actions as the dispatch of indoctrinated youth from mosques to Muslim households in certain neighbourhoods to pressure residents to attend Friday prayers—a distressing trend reported to me by a relative in Mississauga, Ontario. Another example: following the decision to organize Friday prayers in publicly funded schools, the same messianic call to prayer takes place in the classroom. It was further brought to my attention recently that in a school in a middle-class neigbourhood in Toronto, Muslim girls must go to the gym to arrange the prayer rugs; they are then expected to sit at the back of the gym until the boys finish praying and leave, at which point the girls are responsible for clearing and rearranging the space. It does not take much imagination to envision the poor sense of worth thus projected onto these 13- and 14-year-old girls.

All this points to a distressing reality: that zealous members of various religions are not being influenced by Canadian secular, democratic values but rather are influencing Canadian society and forcing secular Canadian institutions to yield to religious

orthodoxies. The most recent episode in this saga is the petition produced by a group of Christian and Muslim parents against Ontario's anti-bullying legislation, Bill 13. These parents mobilized against an inclusive curriculum that covered sex education and same-sex love, and demanded that their children be exempt from the instruction.

To conclude, I am sadly aware that the subjects that I have felt compelled to explore and debate have often put me at odds with some of my left-leaning feminist colleagues, who, in their efforts to counter the dominant Eurocentrism, resort to what is, in my view, relativist Third-Worldism. I have tried to argue that it is just as crucial to disclose, criticize, and put a stop to religiously sanctioned crimes, such as honour killings, stoning women to death on charges of adultery, and legislated practices of child marriage, as it is to struggle against racism that targets Muslims within or outside the Middle East. To keep silent about the obscurantist ideas and policies of radical Islamists, or worse, to condone and justify their actions, contradicts the internationalist character of feminism, which promised that its ideals and commitment would transcend national borders and nationalism. For many of us, a feminism whose commitment to revolutionize human relations and embrace all the oppressed groups of all "races" presented itself as an intellectual and political refuge from the traditional left, and I, for one, hate to think that we have gone full circle in the last two decades. It would be demoralizing to find ourselves back at our point of origin, forced once again to prioritize the struggle for gender equity vis-à-vis other battles for justice and democracy.

My position on these matters has forced me to walk a fine line between orientalists and the apologetics of Islamism, as I have felt compelled to confront two conflicting realities: on one hand, the new wave of anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia, and on the other, the surge in radical Islamism. In all cases, I have weathered hostile reactions. So it seems that I continue to play the role of "victime volontaire" in my new country, Canada.